

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

Horizon

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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BY KENNETH CLARK

FATHER AND SON BY OSBERT SITWELL

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HORIZON

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Vol. XVI No. 90 July 1947

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REPRODUCTIONS OF PAINTINGS BY ANDRÉ MASSON
appear between pages 36 and 37

The editorial and publishing Offices of HORIZON are at 2 Lansdowne Terrace, W.C.1. TER: 4898.—Annual Subscription 32s. net, including postage; 6 months 16s.; U.S.A. and Canada: \$7.50 a year, single copies 65c. Agents for U.S.A.: Gotham Book Mart, 41 West 47th Street, New York City; Canada: The Jonathan David Co., 1501 St. Catherine Street West, Montreal, 25; Sweden: Importbokhandeln, Regeringsgatan 39, Stockholm; Norway: Narvesens Kioskkompani, Stortingsgata 2, Oslo.

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JOHN LEHMANN

COMMENT

IN order to prepare an edition of essays from *Horizon* for translation into German it was necessary last week to run through all ninety odd numbers. Surprisingly enough the more recent ones turned out to be the best, that is to say the most solid; the return since Christmas, to eighty pages, makes it possible to have two long articles (occasionally one very long one), in the same number and these long articles sometimes possess (as in Lean's 'Study of Toynbee' or Gerald Brenan's 'St. John of the Cross') a depth and grasp which is quite out of the run of current literary journalism, while many of the fireworks in earlier numbers which achieved immediate popularity are now inclined to appear superficial and shoddy. One is also conscious of a change of policy which would appear to be justified. This change is expressed in our belief that the honeymoon between literature and action, once so promising, is over. We can see, looking through these old *Horizons*, a left-wing and sometimes revolutionary political attitude among writers, heritage of Guernica and Munich, boiling up to a certain aggressive optimism in the war years, gradually declining after D-day and soon after the victorious general election despondently fizzling out. It would be too easy to attribute this to the policy of the editors, their war-weariness, and advancing years. The fact remains that a Socialist Government besides doing practically nothing to help artists and writers (unless the closing down of magazines during the fuel crisis can be interpreted as an aid to incubation), has also quite failed to stir up either intellect or imagination; the English renaissance, whose false dawn we have so enthusiastically greeted, is further away than ever. Even Socialist magazines like *Tribune* and *The New Statesman* seem desperately short of new talent and the sole outstanding Socialist writer remains J. B. Priestley. Somehow, during the last two years, the left-wing literary movement has petered out, with Europe's new golden age, or the dream of a merry and aesthetically-minded Socialist State. The atomic bomb renders most individual action futile; our fate is in the hands of four men, Truman, Stalin, Marshall, Molotov, and there is but little we can do about it; the one answer to the atomic bomb is an international world state based on a religion of absolute pacifism founded on the sacredness

of human life. If we can be exploded by the hundred thousand into brown dust, like a rotten puff-ball, then we must at all costs believe, as the truly great have believed, that the hairs of our heads are numbered and that every thing which lives is holy.

In the light of the comparative failure of the 'progressive' movement of the last few years to rise above intelligent political journalism into the realms of literature, we must look elsewhere, either to the mad and lonely, or to those who have with a certain angry obstinacy meticulously cultivated their garden. Among these the Sitwells shine out, for during the darkest years of the war they managed not only to produce their best work, to grow enormously in stature, but to find time to be of immense help to others. Many poets and writers were consoled by their encouragement as well as by their intransigent example, and so this number, at the risk of the inevitable accusations that we support a literary clique, is wholeheartedly dedicated to them. It includes a new poem by Miss Sitwell, an essay on her later poetry by Sir Kenneth Clark which mentions her most recent work *The Shadow of Cain* (published by John Lehmann, and among much else a magnificent anti-atomic protest) and a new fragment of Sir Osbert's autobiography in which the Father-Son conflict is treated with his engaging *aigre-douceur de vivre*. In order to dominate the present one must withdraw from it, such would seem the lesson of these sages, and let us hope that they can overcome even the gathering acedia of the reading public, corrupted by summer heat and murder trials, gnawed by anxiety and post-war disillusion, stricken by shortages, hourly more unable to concentrate, always ready for a lark until the skies darken with a new black-out, and the winter of cold, poverty and famine induced by their own folly compels them again to try a bit of reading.

★ ★ ★

A double number on the Arts in America, 160 pages, 5s., will appear simultaneously in England and the United States on October 1st.

STEPHEN SPENDER

O NIGHT O TREMBLING NIGHT

O NIGHT O trembling night O night of sighs
O night when my body was a rod O night
When my mouth was a vague animal cry
Pasturing on her flesh O night
When the close darkness was a nest
Made of her hair and filled with my eyes

(O stars impenetrable above
The fragile tent poled with our thighs
Among the petals fading fields of time
O night revolving all our dark away)

O day O gradual day O sheeted light
Covering her body as with dew
Until I brushed her sealing sleep away
To read once more in the uncurtained day
Her naked love, my great good news.

C. DAY LEWIS

THE NEUROTIC

The spring came round, and still he was not dead.
Skin of the earth deliciously powdered
With buttercups and daisies—oh, Proserpina
Refreshed by sleep, wild-cherry-garlanded,
And laughing in the sallies of the willow-wren!
With lambs and lilies spring came round again.

Who would suppose, seeing him walk the meadows,
He walks a treadmill there, grinding himself
To powder, dust to greyer dust, or treads
An invisible causeway lipped by chuckling shadows?
Take his arm if you like, you'll not come near him.
His mouth is an ill-stitched wound opening: hear him.

'I will not lift mine eyes unto the hills
For there white lambs nuzzle and creep like maggots.
I will not breathe the lilies of the valley
For through their scent a chambered corpse exhales.
If a petal floats to earth, I am oppressed.
The grass-blades twist, twist deep in my breast.'

The night came on, and he was still alive.
Lighted tanks of streets aswarm with denizens
Darting to trysts, sauntering to parties.
How all the heart-fires twinkle! Yes, they thrive
In the large illusion of freedom, in love's net
Where even the murderer can act and the judge regret.

This man who turns a phrase and twiddles a glass
Seems far from that pale muttering magician
Pent in a vicious circle of dilemmas.

But could you lift his blue, thick gaze and pass
Behind, you would walk a stage where endlessly
Phantoms rehearse unactable tragedy.

'In free air captive, in full day benighted,
I am as one for ever out of his element
Transparently enwombed, who from a bathysphere
Observes, wistful, amazed, but more affrighted,
Gay fluent forms of life weaving around,
And dares not break the bubble and be drowned.'

His doomsdays crawled like lava, till at length
All impulse clogged, the last green lung consumed,
Each onward step required the sweat of nightmare,
Each human act a superhuman strength . . .
And the guillemot, clotted with oil, droops her head.
And the mouse between the elastic paws shams dead.

Death mask of a genius unborn:
Tragic prince of a rejected play:
Soul of suffering that bequeathed no myth:
A dark tower and a never-sounded horn.
Call him what we will, words cannot ennoble
This Atlas who fell down under a bubble.

EDITH SITWELL

A SIMPLETON

To David Horner

In the autumn the season of ripeness when final redness
Comes to the ore and the earth is with child by the sun,
Like the bright gold spangles fall'n from the light of Nature
Flying over the happy fields, the Simpleton
Feeling the warm gold ripen, sat by the wayside
—His broad face having an animal nature (the beast of burden
Who has turned prophet—the beast in our earth unconscious)—
A simple creature, happy as butterflies,
Or as the dancing star that has risen from Chaos.
And the world hangs like a ripe apple—the great gold planets
Lying with Evil and Good in the ripened core.
. . . The old men Abraham-bearded like the auburn
Sun of harvest walk in the holy fields
Where the Sun forgives and remakes the shape of Evil
And, laughing, forgives lean Virtue . . . Gravity yields
The gold that was hidden deep in its earth, in the map-like
Lines of a smile made holy by Light, and the Sun
With his gold mouth kisses the skin that shines like red fire,
And shouts to the lowly, the dust that is his lover,
'See how of my love and my shining I never tire,
But rule over thunders and Chaos: the lore of the bee and the
great lion's raging
To me are equal in grandeur—the hump of the cripple
And the mountain that hides the veins of brute gold are as one—
And to me the jarring atoms are parted lovers!'
. . . And this is the lore the Simpleton learns from his nature—
Lifting his face in blindness and happiness up to the Sun.

KENNETH CLARK

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MISS SITWELL'S LATER STYLE

NOT even the most enthusiastic admirers of Miss Sitwell's earlier poetry—and the present writer has loved it since his school days—can have foreseen the development of her work during the last six or seven years. With the appearance of *Street Songs* and *Green Song*, those who care for poetry recognized a true poetic and prophetic cry which had not been heard in English since the death of Yeats. This was not merely exquisite poetry: it was great poetry; we felt once more the excitement of having amongst us a poet who could give us back our sight and our belief in the human heart, a poet on Shelley's definition. And, naturally, we are anxious to know by what steps this new eminence has been achieved.

Miss Sitwell's earlier poetry was written from a strange secluded world. We picture her imprisoned in an enormous kitchen garden where, to her childish eyes, the flowers, leaves and fruits are all of giant size. At one end of the garden is a summer house in the Chinese taste, faded and ramshackle, a few bells still tinkling from its eaves, and on its wallpaper, faintly discernible, Chinese ladies and gentlemen saluting one another with elegant *desinvoltura*. No human beings enter this garden, except a governess and an ancient, wrinkled gardener, who remains for long the most important figure in her imagination, but in the corner is a gazebo from which it is possible to catch sight of the neighbours, queer, country eccentrics, as they go to call on the great house.

In this garden the young lady lives in a kind of trance of sensuous receptivity. She sees, smells, touches and reads; and all her senses become confused and united. 'My senses', she wrote later, 'are like those of primitive peoples, at once acute and uncovered—and they are interchangeable!' This interchange is the basis of her early poetry. It accounts for the immediacy of her images, and from it develops that rarest of all sensibilities, the

feeling for texture. When, long afterwards, Miss Sitwell writes of Pope that 'had his verses been transformed into flowers, he could have told lily from rose, buttercup from cowslip, in no matter how starless and moonless a night, merely from touching one petal', we can be sure that this is not critical fantasy, but a description of her own experience.

Picturing this young lady, we are reminded of another lonely child, nervous and over-bred, sitting in a forsaken garden, mesmerized by the sensuous quality of words, Algernon Charles Swinburne. Throughout Miss Sitwell's poetry a Swinburnian element persists. We are conscious of it in her elaborate technique, in her uncanny sensibility to the texture of language; and also, I dare say, in an occasional diffuseness, and in a feeling that the central core of her meaning is veiled in mist, and will dissolve if we approach it too closely. Miss Sitwell herself has accepted this kinship with Swinburne, and in the introduction to her anthology of Victorian poetry, she has described how the young lady from the enormous kitchen garden, complete with reluctant governess, laid a pagan offering, milk, honey and bay leaves, on the poet's tomb in the Isle of Wight. Miss Sitwell's appreciation of Swinburne's verbal mastery, which follows the account of her pilgrimage, is one of the most illuminating of all her critical studies, and one of the most personal. Many young people adored Swinburne in the early years of this century, but few mature poets would have admitted to an equal admiration in 1932.

But this parallel must not be carried any further; for the essential limitation of Swinburne is that his mind never expanded; his emotions never deepened, and his genuinely poetic impulses were always those which had been absorbed in childhood and youth. He never grew up. The extraordinary fact about Miss Sitwell, and the one which concerns us now, is that she did. We have no right to ask how Miss Sitwell came to leave her *hortus conclusus*. Perhaps she herself has given all the answer we need in a short poem called *Poor Young Simpleton*:

Once my love seemed the Burning Bush
The Pentecost Rushing of Flames;
Now the Speech has fallen to the chatter of alleys
Where fallen man and the rising ape
And the howling Dark play games.

For she leaned from the light like the Queen of Fairies

Out of the bush of the yellow broom . . .
 'I'll take out that heart of yours,' she said,
 'And put in your breast a stone.
 'O, I'll leave an empty room,' she said,
 'A fouled, but an empty room.'

The immediate results of this experience are expressed in that terrifying poem called *Gold Coast Customs*, of which Miss Sitwell says, 'it was written with anguish, and I would not willingly relive that birth'. It is, in fact, a cry of horror at the spectacle of evil, and all the images of fear which have ever oppressed a nightmare, all the unspoken moments of horror which dustbins and back streets, old books of travel and ethnographical museums have stamped on the sensitive retina, are accumulated and repeated, as if there never could be enough to relieve the mind of its loathsome burden. The horror of the images is intensified by the terrifying tom-tom rhythms in which the poem is written, rhythms varying from the sinister rhythms of the jungle to the infinitely degraded, hollow, tom-tom rhythms of Jazz, the music of nothingness and futility. In spite of her anguish of spirit, Miss Sitwell has been able to command all the technical skill of what I may call her Chinoiserie poems; indeed, there was in these poems a peculiar spikiness of rhythm, and an occasional black shadow of sound which by a slight twist, were perfect instruments for her new purpose. As a work of art, *Gold Coast Customs* suffers from being too close to an appalling spiritual shock. It leaves us in the chaos of despair, and art is the opposite of chaos.

But yet if only one soul would whine,
 Rat-like from the lowest mud, I should know
 That somewhere in God's vast love it would shine;
 But even the rat-whine has guttered low.

At the end there is a chink of hope, but it is vague, improbable and unsatisfying:

Though Death has taken
 And pig-like shaken
 Rooted and tossed
 The rags of me.

Yet the time will come
To the heart's dark slum
When the rich man's gold and the rich man's wheat
Will grow in the street, that the starved may eat.

After *Gold Coast Customs*, it is not surprising to find that Miss Sitwell wrote no poetry for many years. She was recreating her spirit, seeking a belief or a vision which would enable her to transcend the evil and misery in the world; and, during these years, evil was moving towards its catastrophe. We must suppose that much of her time was passed in reading, for these are the years of her anthologies of poetry with their critical introductions. And here I may say in parentheses that these introductions seem to me, within their self-imposed limits, to be among the most valuable pieces of modern criticism, and a merciful relief from that sheep in wolf's clothing, Taine's *English Literature* in a new disguise, the sociological criticism of Marxism. It is true that they endow the reader with a very subtle ear and demand from him very strict attention; and few readers, perhaps, can have followed Miss Sitwell in her discrimination of every nuance of sound. But anyone who has attempted to do so must have had his capacity for enjoying poetry increased beyond measure; and what more can we ask of criticism? As well as English poetry, her reading must have included Donne's sermons, Burton's *Anatomy*, St. Thomas Aquinas, the Meister Eckhart and Schopenhauer; also the Homeric hymns, Pindar and other sources of classic ritual. It is as if, after the chaotic black magic, the tom-tom magic of *Gold Coast Customs*, she needed the white magic of the mystics or the golden magic of Demeter.

During this long night of poetic inspiration, or perhaps we should say this dread of accepting poetic inspiration, like a child who dare not sleep for fear of its dreams, Miss Sitwell also wrote a novel *I Live under a Black Sun*. In choosing for her subject the life of Jonathan Swift, the great protagonist of universal disgust, she was certainly guided by a therapeutic instinct, and some of her own horror and indignation were eased by absorption in the tragedy of this heroic nihilist. In the same spirit, she wrote descriptions of human wretchedness, more poignant than anything in *Gold Coast Customs*, which show how closely the shock of her spirit had been connected with the spectacle of poverty. The novel also contains, to the bewilderment, it may well be,

of the regular novel reader, strange rhapsodic interludes, which seem like incidental music between the various sections of the narrative; and in these we feel that she is making her way back to poetry. Words and images float in and out, which are to re-appear in *Street Songs*—the Potter's Field, the River of Lethe, the Man in Armour on the Roman Road, the Priests crying for Rain—and beyond these there are whole passages which are later to be reworked in poems.

I Live under a Black Sun was published in 1936. In the same year Miss Sitwell published a volume of collected poems in which the observant reader might have noticed one new poem, strangely different in style and content from the rest of the collection, significantly entitled *Prelude*. In spite of very great beauties, it is not a completely successful poem: it is too literary, the fruit of too much reading. Many of its lines seem to come from an unknown classic of English literature; they are not quite in Miss Sitwell's new voice, and the few lines it contains in her old voice are ill at ease in this traditional company. Yet *Prelude* is of crucial importance, for it introduces the two fundamental changes in her later poetry. First, the lines have an entirely different movement. Gone are the rhythms of the Chinese wall-paper, gone the decorative details, the diminutives, the pretty Christian names, and gone, thank God, the tom-tom beats of darkness. All these have served their purpose, but they have enchanted or frightened us with a mirage; the new vision requires an ampler style, a rhythm capable of sustaining simple, passionate and prophetic statements of belief. And *Prelude* contains the first consciousness of this belief, which has been growing during these years of darkness.

'... the winter's shade
furred my cold blood wherein plant, beast, are laid,
In that dark earth from which shall spring the soul.'

To discover Miss Sitwell's expression of this faith is not difficult; for her later poetry has the peculiarity that those ideas and images which mean most to her are constantly re-appearing in slightly different, sometimes even in identical, form. As some medieval craftsman with a store of precious jewels and antique cameos, the objects of his deepest delight, is constantly re-setting them that he may achieve absolute finality in the expression of

his visionary world, so Miss Sitwell resets her most precious images. And when we find one of these re-appearing several times we may be sure that it is at the centre of her experience. Such are the closing lines of *Prelude*. They occur in almost identical language, but with the necessary modifications of prose, in the second chapter of *I Live under a Black Sun*; they re-appear again about six years later in the poem called *An Old Woman*. It is significant that this last version contains lines from the prose passage which Miss Sitwell was not able to assimilate into the stricter and less assured prosodic structure of *Prelude*. Clearly, this is of unusual importance to her, and I therefore quote it in full in its (till now) final form. To those interested in Miss Sitwell's technique, and in the creative process generally, I recommend a comparison of the three versions; it is a lesson in composition—although I may confess to a slight regret that 'crooked' took the place of 'cripple' in the tenth line, an improvement in texture at the expense of vividness.

'For when the first founts and deep waterways
Of the young light flow down and lie like peace
Upon the upturned faces of the blind
From life, it comes to bless
Eternity in its poor mortal dress—
Shining upon young lovers and old lechers
Rising from their beds, and laying gold
Alike in the unhopeful path of beggars
And in the darkness of the miser's heart.
The crooked has a shadow light made straight
The shallow places gain their strength again—
And desert hearts, waste heavens, the barren height
Forget that they are cold.
The man-made chasms between man and man
Of creeds and tongues are fill'd, the guiltless light
Remakes all men and things in holiness.'

The other key to the evolution which we are studying is the poem called *Metamorphosis*. Once more the title implies consciousness that this is a poem of transition, and in fact the poem itself was to suffer a complete metamorphosis which is revealing. It was written just before *Gold Coast Customs*, and is a disturbing, unfused mixture of the old Chinoiserie and the coming poetry of

anguish. Both contain great beauties—indeed, Miss Sitwell's Rococo has never been more perfect than at this moment when the black wave of misery was about to engulf it. But the value of the poem lies in its other hemisphere, in the lines where death and the cold have already fastened upon the poet's mind. These are the clearest of all anticipations of her later style, and it is not surprising that when that style was mastered she should have returned to the poem and re-written it with the omission of the Rococo passages. She also omitted a few verses which perhaps she thought were sufficiently expressed in *Gold Coast Customs*, but which are so magnificent in themselves that they are worth rescuing.

'I too from ruined walls hung upside down
And, bat-like, only saw Death's ruined town
And mumbling, crumbling dust . . . I saw the people
Mouthing blindly for the earth's blind nipple.
Their thick sleep dreams not of the infinite
Wild strength the grass must have to find the light
With all the bulk of earth across its eyes
And strength, and the huge weight of centuries.'

The wonderful image of the grass (which is retained in the later version) brings us very close to the beliefs from which her later poetry springs. So does the last stanza.

'Come then, my Sun, to melt the eternal ice
Of Death, and crumble the thick centuries
Nor shrink my soul, as dull wax owlsh eyes
In the sun's light, before my sad eternities.'

A comparison with the two final stanzas of the later version is like a step back from the eighteenth into the seventeenth century. The strict heroic couplets in which the first version was composed yields to a line based on rhythmic stress and not on numbered accents; the address is more passionate and more direct, and we are conscious that she has brooded on the experience of the mystics.

'So, out of the dark, see our great Spring begins
—Our Christ, the new song, breaking out in the fields and
hedgerows,
The heart of man! O the new temper of Christ, in veins and
branches.

B

He comes, our Sun, to melt the eternal ice
Of Death, the crusts of Time round the shrunken Soul
Coming again in the spring of the world, clothed with the
scarlet coloured
Blood of our martyrdoms—the fire of spring.'

These examples show that Miss Sitwell's later style was evolved in the ten years between *Gold Coast Customs* and 1939, and was not, as is sometimes supposed, the result of the war. Nevertheless the catastrophe and the events which led up to it may have helped to focus more clearly her new poetic inspiration, and in *Serenade*, *Street Song* and *Still Falls the Rain*, she wrote the greatest poems of the war. They succeed where others have failed, because in them she is able both to feel the tragedy and to transcend it. Like the great religious poets of the past, she has achieved the consciousness that all creation is one and is kept in motion by Love. In the expression of this consciousness she has evolved certain images. For example, Love is spoken of as the Sun or Gold, the heart of man, 'that second sun'.

'Fires on the hearth! Fires in the heavens! Fires in the hearts of
Men!

I who was welded into bright gold in the earth by Death
Salute you! All the weight of Death in all the world
Yet does not equal Love—the great compassion
For the fallen dust and all fallen creatures, quickening
As is the Sun in the void firmament.
It shines like fire. O bright gold of the heat of the Sun
Of Love across dark fields—burning away rough husks of Death
Till all is fire, and bringing all to harvest!

For as the Sun buries his hot days and rays
To ripen in earth, so the great rays of the heart
Are ripened to wisdom by Death . . .'

In such passages Miss Sitwell speaks with a startling directness and much of her recent poetry is of unexpected simplicity—for example, the beautiful third stanza of *Eurydice*, the poem quoted above. But this simplicity is delusive, like the simplicity of all prophetic utterances; and two stanzas further on her imagery becomes mysterious, though no less beautiful, and, as we feel immediately, no less true to experience. In particular her image of death has taken on a new and mysterious meaning

for her. It has become a source of peace and wisdom, a necessary state through which we must pass before love can be reborn; and her last volume opens with an Invocation to this once-dreaded darkness. Yet it would be shallow to suppose that the desperate unhappiness of *Gold Coast Customs* has been completely overcome. The same horror, expressed with far more mastery, inspires her terrifying *Lullaby*; and *The Song of the Cold* itself is a cry of anguish, though in the end the poet feels strong enough to say:

'I will cry to the spring to give me the birds and the Serpent's
speech
That I may weep for those who die of the cold—
The ultimate cold within the heart of man.'

For, beyond all Christian or Pagan mysteries, all planetary rotations, or transcendental philosophies, Miss Sitwell is moved by an immense tenderness of heart. It is this which gives reality to her war poems, and warmth to her sybilline speech. Of this tenderness she has achieved a perfect expression in that marvellous poem, *A Mother to her Dead Child*, which is surely one of the most moving poems ever written by a woman. How easily it might have come to grief. But it is lifted far beyond sentimentality as the mother's sorrow is raised to a general pity for human misfortune. And then it is the work of a masterly technician.

Anyone writing about Miss Sitwell would be wise to avoid technical questions, for he can certainly not bring to them the knowledge and the delicacy of perception which she has shown in the introduction to her own *Selected Poems*. But it is important to stress the fact that the later poems, which teach us and awaken our pity, are every bit as beautiful in texture as the poems which were written solely to delight. Nothing in her early work is finer in technique than *Green Flows the River of Lethe-O*, where the smooth-sliding opiate texture of its opening stanza leads us with sinister delicacy to the abyss. In her adaptation of an elaborate technique of sound and imagery to simpler and more passionate expression, Miss Sitwell is at one with the symbolist poets of the last half century—Rilke, George, Blok and Yeats; and in fact her development has much in common with Yeats, the greatest of her immediate predecessors. I do not know how far he has influenced her directly, though that magnificent poem *The Poet*

Laments the coming of Old Age certainly owes something to his inspiration, both in its imagery—‘wisdom caught like a hare in the golden sack of the heart’—and in its rich declamatory rhythm. It is almost impossible to read the last two lines except in an Irish accent. But there is an important distinction. Miss Sitwell does not, like Yeats, use symbols with fixed meanings. She has said of her poems that ‘all expression is welded into an image, not removed into a symbol that is inexact or squandered into a metaphor’. The result is that although her poems may sometimes be vaguer than those of a strict symbolist, they are more vivid and more flexible, and they never become mere riddles, as are some of the minor poems of Mallarmé.

In spite of Swinburnian and symbolist characteristics, it is clear from her latest poems that Miss Sitwell’s place in English literature is with the religious poets of the seventeenth century. Again and again the audacity of her sensuous images reminds us of Crashaw; she has Traherne’s rapture at created things, and Vaughan’s sense of eternity. The likeness is less due to direct influence—in fact these poets are seldom mentioned in her pages—than to a similar poetic temperament working under similar conditions. Miss Sitwell is essentially a religious poet; that is to say, she has experienced imaginatively, not merely intellectually, the evil and misery of the world and has overcome that experience by the conviction—the full, imaginative conviction—that all creation is one under the Divine Love. In expressing this conviction she has inevitably been led to use the symbols of Christianity and of that older mystic poetry which it supplanted, combining them, as Botticelli did, from a sense of their beauty and human relevance, without the dogmatic niceties of neo-Platonism.

In her last published work *The Shadow of Cain* Christian symbols have gained ascendancy. This craggy, mysterious philosophic poem, in which the poet looks down from a great eminence of time, is at the furthest remove from the lyrics of the *hortus conclusus*. The world without love, the world of absolute zero, is split in two by some such disastrous convulsion of matter as now hangs over our heads, and there are left two protagonists of humanity, Diyes and Lazarus. The dialogue between them with which the poem ends, is her deepest and most passionate statement of her concern with original sin.

' . . . we cry

To Dives: "You are the shadow of Cain. Your shade is the primal Hunger."

"I lie under what condemnation?"

"The same as Adam, the same as Cain, the same as Sodom, the same as Judas."

And the fires of your Hell shall not be quenched by the rain

From those torn and parti-coloured garments of Christ, those rags

That once were Men. Each wound, each stripe, Cries out more loudly than the voice of Cain—

Saying "Am I my brother's keeper?"

This is the true cry of our time, the cry of all those whose imaginations are still awake and whose hearts are still uncalcined. Miss Sitwell is a religious poet because only thus could she continue to write for this generation without being overcome by despair. She is growing in power and confidence, so that we wait thirstily for each new poem, which, by its beauty, its compassion and its belief in the eternal processes of recreation, can help us to endure the world's fever.

OSBERT SITWELL

FATHER AND SON

By disposition I was fond of nature, but preferred to it then, as I prefer today, the study of art and the enjoyment to be obtained therefrom. And in nature itself, I was more interested by those things that approached nearest to art, flowers and shells and trees and falling water. Outwardly, my character had altered: for when I had gone to school, I had been intensely sociable, but now I had grown shy as well: and, by another contradiction born of my schooling, had become both melancholy and gay, being as silent with those I disliked, as talkative with those I liked. I loved the solitude as much as I enjoyed, too, the life of cities. Extremely high spirited, my greatest advantage was that my constitution did

not allow me to be depressed, even by the most severe occurrences, for more than forty-eight hours at a stretch. That I must have inherited; its origin was no doubt physical, and connected with my large frame—I am over six foot, and even then was by no means meagre—and with my whole physical set-up; for the fair and florid are perhaps less prone to melancholy than the dark of hair and skin. Perhaps it was this same quality which enabled my ancestors to plunge without fear of consequences into the battles of medieval times, and, later, into their great flights of extravagance: yet this advantage was singular, for many members of my family were given to nervous fussing and fretting, qualities that in the end exercise upon the character an erosive effect. I possessed, further, that disregard for money which I have described, and which brought so formative an influence to bear upon my career. In addition, I suffered to an extraordinary degree—and, looking back, this seems strange in a young man of seventeen or eighteen—from boredom; a fact that deeply shocked my father. People, he said, were never bored in medieval times. It was a modern and degenerate emotion. And I recall that once, forgetting his attitude in this matter, I complained of feeling bored, and he reproved me with the words, ‘I never *allow* myself to feel bored’. He became very angry when I unwisely retorted ‘That’s just the difference between us—I never allow *myself* to bore other people!’

This boredom, perhaps, was symptomatic of the artist, constituting a premonition of the feeling he experiences in those terrible moments of repose, when he finds himself unable to create. . . . At any rate, works of art, to go to a picture-gallery or concert, or to read great poetry, were the only things that lifted it from me. . . . And here, too, a curious fact emerges, for though I had been conversant since childhood with many of the masterpieces of Italian art and architecture, and though, when my sister was in the house, I lived with music and poetry, yet my overwhelming and, as it were, creative love of the arts came to me through my introduction to modern works, and so in this manner my approach was a little different from the ordinary. Indeed, I had always preferred modern to renaissance, and renaissance to antique, art, except in very young days when I had been somewhat of a history-snob: I had consistently appreciated better the works of human genius nearest to my own days: but soon I grew to understand the

Primitives, through my love of the Post-Impressionists, and to adore Bach and Mozart, as I have said, through the avenues opened to me by my favourite modern masters, Debussy and Stravinsky. About works of art, as about people, I had always possessed a great and consuming curiosity. I would be happy for hours, talking to someone I had not met before, and reading the strange book of his or her character. There were other qualities, too, that I knew in my heart to be derived from my heredity; among them, the more than ordinary share of pride and vanity that in those days I possessed.

These were humbled every day by my father's continual snubbings and condemnation of all my ways; they were to be further mortified by events. . . . During this whole time, the shadow that moved with us, wherever we went, was growing and darkening; some agency was at work, both in the family and outside it, loosening the fibres, darkening the colours. Something was going wrong in the world, and could surely be felt by the sensitive, through the intense sweetness of being alive at that time; something, too, had gone wrong in the house. The airy vistas and green pleasaunces of the garden were delusive in their grandeur, and behind them lay the mean streets, the pawnshops, the prisons—the prison. But these things could not be seen. As the world looked, in contrast to how one felt it to be, it was at last flowering. This was the moment of Europe's fullest bloom. In spite of the fact that it occupies so small a part of the surface of the globe, for a continent, it was the West End of the world. All the trade, all the benefits of exploitation flowed in to enrich it. Luxury goods streamed out from its capitals. Even the usual drink of the crowd, of the poor—tea or coffee—was cultivated by under-paid labour in dark continents where nature was still fierce—and as for cocoa, the soothing bed-time drink of the middle classes, it was proved to be grown under conditions almost of slavery. Nevertheless, Europe flourished; the rose leaves had not yet begun to fall, nor the fruit ostensibly to become corrupt: but already the decay of the political State, the structure, was imminent, though few recognized it. Everyone throughout Europe and America, everyone, of all nations and classes, except a few who, disagreeing with the verdict of the majority, were termed 'cranks', was convinced of the reality of material progress, and therefore of the coming of the kingdom of heaven upon earth. Only material things existed

and we believed as blindly in material building up as, in wars, we believe in material destruction. You could see the improvement—and touch it—in every country—and so, since material improvement alone was of consequence, the world at large was enjoying one of its happiest moments for centuries.

Yet for me, the time between leaving Eton, and finding—or rather being thrown into—a profession, was only lit by the flame of my animal high spirits, and perhaps by a certain power of imagination. 1910 and '11 were, I think, the peak years, both of my father's irritability, and of my own misery . . . In part, my father's condition was caused by the very width of his range, by the superabundance of his plans and projects; in part, by my mother's utter lack of interest in them, and inability to pretend, by her rages, too, so inexplicably easy to rouse; while, on his side, too, his irritability and perpetual gloomy prognostications about the state to which even the simplest and most natural courses of conduct would reduce one, combined with a lack, as it were, of warmth and spontaneity to render him a very far from ideal companion for her. She had, the reader of the former volumes will recall, been married when she was seventeen, and I find a letter from his former tutor—not the most tactful of men—to my father, which contains the following sentences.

'After all your theorizing we shall look for something peerless in your bride elect . . . To be married in less than a month takes the breath away. . . . It is too late to enter into a discussion of the advantages of "marrying out of the schoolroom"', so I am afraid I must submit with a good grace to seeing my theories disproved by practical demonstration. . . .'

My father had thought that it would be easy for him to mould the character of any young girl, and took no account, except in his own case, of the influences of heredity. Throughout his life, it was his ill fortune to misread and misunderstand the character of those around him, and, in consequence, to cast them wrongly for their parts. To them he assigned precisely the merits, no less than the faults, which they did not possess. This was perhaps chief of the qualities that in the end nullified his great strength of character and remarkable gifts, just as his irritability cancelled out his natural kindness. The inevitable discovery of the fact—and his eventual recognition of it—that he could not influence in the least the development of my mother's disposition, led him to feel

embittered against her *family*. And it was for this reason chief among others, that, when we were alone together, he would so frequently watch me, for minutes at a time, with a cautious, sidelong look of distaste, and then exclaim, suddenly, in a tone of marked disapprobation, 'You smiled just like your uncle', or 'You said that just like your grandfather'. (When, in this connection, he used to me the word 'your', thereby, as it were, seeking to fix upon me the responsibility, it always, of course, signified a relation of my mother's.) He remained on the watch. Thus, though it was easy, already, when in a hurry to hire a motor to reach your destination, he successfully persuaded himself that it was my practice to charter a special train: a sin I had never committed. He used, therefore, to say to me, from time to time, in a broken-hearted voice with a sob never far from its sound, 'I do hope you won't take a special train. It's your grandfather and uncle coming out all over again!' In addition, he indicated faults that were more my own: but even the good points that from time to time—and how infrequently—he saw in me—were the product, equally, of his imagination. For example, he used towards the end of his life to say to people, when I was coming to see him in Italy, 'One good thing about seeing Osbert is that it keeps me in touch with modern slang.' These misconceptions—even this one, as will later be seen—led often to amusing sequels: but they prepared the way, too, for disaster. They led him in particular to place trust in the untrustworthy, no less than to quarrel with, and perpetually denigrate, those in his employment upon whom he could rely. So it was that he came to be frustrated continually, on occasion to be swindled in small ways, and, at the end of his life, to be defrauded on the grand and tragic scale.

Thus, too, he began to make the most singular plans for his children, when they grew up—or so, at least, it always appeared to me. Often he used to deplore the strange chance, by which, having taken so much trouble to get intelligent children, his whole early life having been modelled, apparently, on a sort of Nietzschean-Darwinian uplift scheme towards that goal, we three had been sent down—or up—to him. Just as Dr. Arnold had prayed before the procreating of his children, with what beneficial results we all know, so my father, representative of a less pious and seemingly more scientific generation, had entered upon periods of the most rigorous training, both physical and mental—

and look what he had received for his trouble! It was really very unfair, most disappointing. . . And that the Life Force should have shovelled my sister on to him was even more patently unjust than that It should have allocated to him my brother or myself. Birth, no less than marriage, was, plainly, a lottery: but, whereas he had gone in for it, to obtain a straight nose and charm—rancid, 1880 charm—he had drawn a booby-prize, an aquiline nose and a body inhabited by an alien and fiery spirit. . . . It was difficult to know, really, where to begin the list of just complaints.

The girl was grown up now, and seemed to have developed a most objectionable sense of pity, which made her an uneasy companion for one. You never knew what she might say or do. Once, though her whole allowance was only fifty pounds a year, he had caught her giving five shillings to a beggar. 'Such a mistake!' And, after all, it was really his money. He should have been consulted. She seemed unable to pass a tramp or a beggar without giving him something, whereas the correct thing to do was not to see a person of that kind. She could not play games, and the extent to which she loved music was unladylike. She possessed no small talk, and could not, even now, recite Austin Dobson—and was it not even worse; was it not *would* not, rather than *could* not? Because her memory for poetry, he had found out from the governess, was remarkably good, and when travelling by train abroad, she could find peace during long and bumpy nights by repeating to herself the whole of *St. Agnes' Eve*, and various long passages from Shakespeare. . . . There had also been that unfortunate episode at Bournemouth, which had caused a great deal of pain and worry to older people.

I asked what the 'unfortunate episode' was. . . . It had occurred thus. . . . My sister had been paying a long visit to my grandmother Sitwell, to whom she was much attached, at Bournemouth: in which camping-ground of godly invalids, everywhere breathing heavily in red-tiled shelters, pitched *à la Japonaise* under pinetrees, or reclining on beds and sofas under turrets and pepper-pots of red brick and rough-cast, behind luxuriant hedges of arbutus and fuchsia, over which they can distinguish the spires, rain-grey, of many churches, the old lady had taken a house. The prevailing atmosphere of religion and old age may at times have been a little uncongenial; but the life to which my sister was exposed at home made her eager to pay as many visits to my

grandmother as possible: at least she was always treated with kindness and consideration, and allowed that dignity which is so precious to a young human being. At first, therefore, my sister was very happy, for she was away from home, and the tormenting which in her case the word spelt. But the circles of visiting clergy that, wherever my grandmother might be, at once sprang up round the old lady like a circle of plainly inedible fungi, took soon to wrestling daily with my sister over the poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne, with whose works she was at the time intoxicated. They were immoral, the toadstools pronounced, and she should not be permitted to read them. Canon Groucher urged on my grandmother that they should be impounded and burnt. Any reasonable girl should be content, so far as poetry was concerned, with the works of T. E. Brown and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In the course of time, my sister became so much enraged by the continual attacks made upon her favourite poet, that she determined to show her feeling for him in a manner that could not be mistaken.

Very early, then, one lovely September morning, she had flitted, having given no previous notice to my grandmother of her going, and, accompanied by her maid, had boarded the small boat that plied from Bournemouth to Ventnor, Isle of Wight. There, a few hours later, under the bright pennons of the summer weather, with its fleecy white clouds and high-flung seas, a singular spectacle must have greeted the curious eyes of any passers-by. A tall, fair, rather thin young lady, paler than usual after her rough journey, yet with colour coming and going from the love and defiance in her heart, disembarked, bearing a large sheaf of red roses: after her, the second figure in this frieze of two, came, with faltering steps, a woman of about thirty, with all her lady's-maid trimmings dishevelled by the crossing, her face a sour green, and wearing this morning an expression of the plainest condemnation of the whole enterprise in which she found herself engaged, and of dislike (if the spectator could discern that much) both for poetry and the sea; she carried a jug of milk, a honey-comb, a wreath of bay-leaves, and the young lady's coat. After a few moments, my sister found an open cab, drawn by a horse so old that Swinburne himself as a boy might have ridden behind it, and drove, with her maid still disapproving, through lanes just tinged with autumn's first fine gold, to Bonchurch; where,

alighting, the procession entered the churchyard. After a furious battle with a sexton, who objected to such foreign ways, Edith triumphed and, bending low under an enormous fuchsia, its tasselled flowers of scarlet and purple trailing over a headstone, in the Grecian mode poured the milk, and placed the wreath of bay-leaves, the honeycomb and the red roses, upon the grave of Swinburne. . . This safely accomplished, she drove back with her maid to Ventnor, and returned to Bournemouth and my grandmother. An appalling storm broke round her head, followed by calm patches of religious resignation.

My father, when news of this exploit reached him, was most displeased. It was plain that the girl would never make a success of anything: he began to lay his plans. Later on, in a year or two, she had better enter the shop, near Piccadilly, of a once fashionable photographer, whose bankrupt business he had been obliged to take over in cancellation of a bad debt. He could afford to pay her a salary of a pound a week, and she could find out of it her own money for dress and all the pleasures to which in these days the young considered they possessed a perfect right! I was his eldest son—well, that entailed its own place, *ex-officio*, in the universe. For the rest, he would reserve judgement on what it would be best for me to do, until it became clearer for what precise profession I showed least aptitude and liking. But for Sacheverell's future, he had already arranged: he could either become a lawyer in Sheffield or mineral agent to the Sitwell Estate; which in either case could offer him a considerable amount of work, which he must, of course, for his part, undertake to execute at special rates. ('In late medieval times, younger sons often did such things, went in for trade, and lived in provincial cities, Sheffield or Birmingham. . . . Charmin' life in many ways.' 'Certainly not! Why should provincial cities be different from what they were now, in medieval times? . . . Such a mistake to quibble.') . . . To return to his plans for my own future, it was not so important to make his own, as to prevent mine.

During these years I could do little that was right. Golf had succeeded puff-ball, as puff-ball, ping-pong, for the test of a man's ability as leader. (My father liked the game particularly, for he had been able to lay out two golf-courses, and proposed soon to build club-houses—one was to be planned by Lutyens, with a

fan-shaped dining-room, crystal chandeliers and fleur-de-pêche chimney pieces, so that Sheffield business men could feel at home: whereas you could not really build a ping-pong or puff-ball pavilion.) Everywhere in England and America, statesmen were already preparing their triumphs of 1914 and '39 by spending long days on the golf-course, and long nights at the bridge-table. One would be lost in an uncharted world, without some understanding of these games. But I showed no capacity for golf—and so, every day in the summer holidays of 1909, of which I am talking, this singular man would send for me, and storm at me about my failures in this respect, as in many others. He made no attempt—and all this genuinely with my welfare taking the first conscious place in his heart—to perceive in what direction my interests lay, to make use of them, or draw more out of me. Instead, he most assiduously and effectively sapped my self-esteem; and when I was just at the age—sixteen and seventeen—to need every grain of it I could summon up.

There seemed no one to help me. Sacheverell was too young, though he always fought valiantly on my behalf. Edith was still away a good deal, in Paris and Berlin and staying with friends—and, had she been at home, her own state of subjugation would only have been worse than mine, and she could have done nothing to aid me. Nor did my mother, even if she had been able to understand the position, seem now to possess any inclination to come to my rescue. Her own affairs, though she did not in the least comprehend the extent of the catastrophe which was beginning to loom in front of her, were now starting to worry her. She complained, too, of feeling middle-aged. She attended to nothing in the house, chose no wall-paper, or cover, undertook no household duties—nor, indeed, would she have been allowed to do so by my father, had she attempted it. She contented herself with sitting in her room, among bunches of tuberose and sweet geranium, reading innumerable newspapers. Occasionally she would give vent to a favourite maxim. One I remember well, because in subsequent years it seemed strange to hear it coming from the lips of the mother of three authors; '*Never put pen to paper*'. In reality, however, this was said in allusion to the growing number of quarrels—mostly on matters of business, for he did not write letters to friends—in which, owing to his habit of letting his pen indulge in comments and strictures that were far more

disagreeable than those he was accustomed to pass verbally, my father involved himself.

This tendency was, for its part, the result largely of a growing refusal to see things as they were; a characteristic I must again stress, because of its later and most calamitous results. Thus one day, some years later, he suddenly demanded, 'Where is that cabinet full of beautiful old Leeds China that I arranged in the ballroom last year?' Plainly he believed in it, and thought I had sold it secretly. Yet it had, so far as any of us were aware, never existed. Thus, as an early instance of what I seek to indicate, and one amusing in itself, I might produce the long extract from the Estate Correspondence, which is entitled *A Fatal Gift of Shrubs and some Roses*: for in this, the statement of the elder Hollingworth, in 1896, that my father had begun to find fault with everyone, and in this fault-finding to border, when it suited him, on deliberate untruth, perhaps indicates that particular point in his life at which he ceased to be able to tell those things that he created in his imagination, things that he feared or loved, or just imagined, from those that possessed an objective existence. Never did my father permit anyone to argue with him, or to state views that were contrary to his own. That there could be such, he would not allow himself to perceive. Nobody had argued with him, nobody had contradicted him, now, for several decades, perhaps for nearly half a century. If anyone ventured to dispute any opinion he held—as sometimes we children did—or to combat any particularly fantastic statement about, for example, some friend one knew much better than he did, he would omnisciently reply, with an air of final and absolute authority, and without deeming it necessary to offer proof or divulge the source of such, no doubt mystical awareness, '*We happen to know*'.

Formerly he had made the sorties we have noticed, though they became more and more infrequent, from his ivory tower, but now that he carried it about with him, it was difficult for him to fight his way out. His natural aloofness had hardened, and now encased him. Yet, middle age had softened him, too, but in the wrong places. He began to seek human sympathy; unable, however, to see his way in the modern world, he sought it from people who could not supply it; who could only give flattery. And now, moreover, he was adopting, or trying to adopt—for

he was never really able to succeed in it—the common ideas of those, with whom, for the sake of their sycophancy, he surrounded himself. (Of these, I shall write in the space of a page or two.) His desire to interpret what they gave him as what he required, rendered him still less able to recognize the truth when he approached it. Together with sad attempts to escape into what he believed to be the contemporary world, there came a general decay of his gothic mould and personality; which had, for its style, to be strict and limited. . . Nevertheless, if he showed himself agreeable, now, from time to time, to those whose duty and responsibility it was to return praise, it made him even less inclined to take a favourable view of those whom Nature had placed round him. In further compensation, it caused his letters to be couched in more and more offensive terms. So courteous in ordinary conversation with strangers, and in many directions both kind and imaginative, it yet seemed as if when my father took up a pen he just could not put things in an agreeable way. On the contrary he went to the greatest trouble to render them sufficiently unpleasant, writing them over and over again in quest of perfection. So well did he succeed in this respect that one near relative, and a trustee of his marriage settlement, came so greatly to dread the sight of my father's handwriting on an envelope, that he taught his valet to distinguish it, pick it out and burn it, without informing his master. Let me give an instance of how he wrote to me when I was eighteen Thanks for the accounts. I am always struck by how much better off you are than I am. You give a footman ten shillings when five shillings at the outside is the proper thing, and porters a shilling, when I give sixpence. It is very generous, but reminds me of Jack Brale, who, when he travelled with me, bought franc cigars when he could put them down in my hotel bill, and half-penny ones when he had to pay for himself.' Yet, since I was inexperienced and my fault was venial, all that was necessary was for him to tell me quietly, without flourish, that in his opinion I was inclined to give too much. Asceticism had begun to constitute for others a duty; but the standard no longer applied to himself. The chief and most noticeable point in his private relationship was a system of fault-finding, as with a divining-rod, that continually grew and strengthened. This, in its effect, militated against his ever getting the best out of the people round him: in fact to sum up in the

words my agent has frequently used to me in the past, 'The worst of Sir George is, he's so damned discouraging!'

To the disagreeable letters he wrote—and in the next few years I was to receive my fair share of them—my father would refer in the phrase 'a rap over the knuckles,' . . . 'I had to give Major Viburne a rap over the knuckles', . . . And here let me proceed to offer an example, more subtle than some. As the reader has gathered, for the past twenty years my father had been writing books, chiefly of local, genealogical or antiquarian interest. Since his serious illness of a few years before, he had written with more regularity, and in 1909, John Murray had published his remarkable volume of essays¹ on the principles governing garden architecture, from which I made a long quotation in the previous volume. A year or two later, at the period with which I am now beginning to deal, he produced a small volume, entitled *The Pilgrim*.² These few pages, bound in brown paper, were to have formed a chapter in the family history—at which, his *magnum opus*, he worked for so many years, though it unfortunately remained uncompleted at the time of his death in 1943—and concerned an ancestor, called *Walter de Boys* or *del Bosco*, father to Symon Cytewil, first of our name, who died on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the year 1250 or 1251.

This little book abounds in gothic ingle-nooks, and contains a great deal about the wild flowers that grew then—or, at any rate subsequently, in the author's imagination—round the gloomy windings of the Rother, the waters of which river are today dark and desolate as those of Lethe. As in many books written by gifted amateurs, and dedicated to the presentation of an idealized past, all the flowers of the year are out at the same season: nor, in spite of the rigid standards prevalent in other directions, do garden varieties hesitate to mingle with their poor and uncultivated relations. Moreover, a tendency to instruct the less informed in the matter of medieval homes and habits occasionally breaks, somewhat breathlessly, through the congealed surface of the prose. And so here I give, as a truthful summary of such books, though by no means pretending that it is a literal quotation, the

¹ *On the Making of Gardens.*

² Printed for the author, for private circulation, by W. H. Smith & Son, Scarborough. Though my father still owned the local Conservative paper there, he had abandoned his press, and broken up the type.

passage that follows. 'The smiling valley of the Rother lay spread beneath the Pilgrim's eyes, as he stood under the old oak tree, now decked in leaves of palest gold, gazing toward those pleasant waters, from which, every now and then a young troutlet leapt into the air from very joy. Never had the fair month of May seemed to him more beautiful. The banks of the stream, deeply indented, were gay with snowdrop and meadow-sweet, with aconite and eglantine and buttercup, with coltsfoot and cranesbill, with sweet gillyflower and the starry blossom of the wild garlic, with toad-flax, willowherb, mignonette and stinking pigbane, with convolvulus, catmint, old man's beard, primrose, peony, and the gentle lousewort. And Walter's eyes filled with tears, as he remembered that in an hour or two he would be leaving his warm old half-timbered hall—with its cruck beams and open hearth in the centre, and with the hole in the roof through which the smoke might escape—for the wide world and its dangers. It might be that he would not see the dear old place again.'

A letter from my father to Turnbull shows that the author had sent his agent the proof or MS. of *The Pilgrim*, and had asked for—and, in fact, received—his advice. The phrasing, I think, indicates that, after the manner of most authors who forward their work, accompanied by a request for 'honest criticism', that which he really sought, indeed craved, was by no means the reader's frank opinion, of which he would be resentful, but in its place, applause, congratulation, and fulsome flattery. In this letter of his, one of my favourites among all of them, to me the sound of his voice underlines every word—and that I believe to be one of the main though least recognized ingredients of literary style. The sudden breaks, the snubs, the bland assumptions—that concerning garlic is particularly delightful—the mixture of pretending to agree and, even, to admit error, and then the sudden masterly bounce out from ambush to administer a sharp 'rap over the knuckles', all these are familiar to me.

March 26th, 1911.

The Curzon Hotel,
Mayfair, W.1.

Dear Peveril Turnbull,

So many thanks for your note on *The Pilgrim*. I think you were a very sound critic, and some of your suggestions I have adopted, though not all. You were quite right as to the sentence 'with wares of cloth and bronze and amber' in it, but the only thing really necessary was to

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replace the comma after 'amber' with a semi-colon. The punctuation was wrong as it stood. No!—hollies were cut for feeding sheep in the winter before roots were invented. Gorse is very black when the buds first open. And I think the smell of garlic charming at a distance—though not too near. Nor can I agree with you when you say that one must remember weeds are weeds. I do not think there are any such things. You should not look at them from the utilitarian point-of-view.

I have written by this post to Messrs. Coutts & Co. to pay in £200 from my estate account to the Sheffield Bank.

Yours very sincerely,

George R. Sitwell.

Nor was the letter to which he refers the only criticism he received. Well do I remember the time of *The Pilgrim* coming out, because, while we were at Renishaw, my sister took up a copy of it which my father had left lying on a table in the ballroom, and, as she read it, becoming a little fatigued by the Wardour-Street panoply of it, seized a pen, inserted in one place an omission-mark after the recurrent name *Walter de Boys*, and wrote above it the two words, *né Hopkins*; a simple joke, but one received by the author of the book with particular displeasure.

That summer, while at home, I was in such continual disgrace that I hid myself as often, and for as long, as possible, and, if I heard my name called by my father, kept out of the way, since I knew it must portend something of an unpleasant nature, another explanation or rebuke, either in private, with a formal air of solemnity, or—this in order to satisfy a sense of power—in front of people for whom I did not care. What my character needed to regenerate it, my father told me constantly, was for me to have to do something unpleasant every, and, if possible, all, day: a doctrine born of the puritanical sense of sin that I have already noticed as so strange a trait in a man of his origin and outlook in other directions . . . What was there? . . . What tasks offered themselves, that were sufficiently odious and oppressive? Then an idea came to him. I had said that the idea of the army as a profession did not appeal to me. The very thing! A fine, healthy time in the open air; and knocking about with a sword provided excellent exercise: and proved splendid training for after-life. (This, as I have said, constituted always a favourite phrase of his, but I was never clear in my mind whether it referred to some later

incorporeal state of existence—in which, in any case, he himself did not believe—or to a subsequent period of this earthly life . . . At any rate, if anyone made some such remark to him as, let us say, 'Poor old Miss Catesby! Have you heard; at the age of seventy-eight, she's lost all her money, and been obliged to take a post in an office', he would always reply comfortably 'Such a good training for after-life!') What branch, then, of the service should it be? Well, I particularly hated horses, so it had better be the Cavalry . . . A wonderful life in the open air, which gave you a good appetite—you felt fit for anything. And an opportunity to use your brains—you could always play polo. And he proceeded to recall to my memory what he had told me before; that, some five or ten years previously, when he had been in command of the local Volunteers, a General who had come down to inspect the regiment, had said to him 'When politics took you away, the British Army lost a Napoleon' . . . (At this time, he was peculiarly conscious of his all-round universal ability, and used sometimes to say to me, as if to emphasize the gulf that separated me, inheriting, as I did, my mother's blood as well as his own, 'Of course, I could have made a success at anything to which I turned my hand'). Then, again, he would go on to sketch life in the army of which he knew a good deal, for he had read Froissart and other Chronicles, had been as a young man in the Yeomanry, as well as later in the Volunteers, and had talked to Major Viburne about it. One never felt so well as under canvas! And if it was bad weather, one could always go and sleep at home.

Instead, then, of being sent to Oxford, where—who knows?—I might really have learned something at last, I was packed off, very suddenly, to an army-crammers; an institution now defunct, rendered happily obsolete by the reformed system of obtaining commissions. Of life in this establishment, I have already been accused of giving an incidental account¹. So I will say nothing on this occasion except that I rather enjoyed it. I had, indeed, dreaded going there, and when I first arrived, had been ill at ease. Every moment I could spare, I spent in reading Shakespeare—to my surprise, nobody seemed to object. There was no attempt, as there would have been at Eton, to 'rag' my room, or burn the books. For the assembled 'young gentlemen'—in the terms

¹ In a story called *Happy Endings*, published in *Dumb Animal*, Duckworth & Co.

which Fagin applied to his rather similar select band—though most of them, refractory by nature and uncompetitive in spirit at examinations, had been sent here by dissatisfied, and often enraged, parents, as to a more genteel Borstal, showed themselves to be unusually tolerant; perhaps because they were treated as grown-up persons. Of course, there were exceptions to the Borstal trend, and among this section I soon found friends: notably two, who remained among my most intimate until they were killed five years later in the First Holocaust. These were James Glass, a young man of intelligence, feeling and the highest spirits, and Rafe Barclay, a great-nephew of Trelawney, who seemed to bring into a duller world something of his uncle's vehemence of living. And here, moreover, in this crammer's, I found myself, for the first time, rather popular with my comrades. In consequence, the months passed quickly. I did not do much work: but for French had as tutor a genuine Frenchman, and I learnt at last to speak it after a fashion, and even to write rather formal letters in the language. Moreover, I was encouraged by the teacher of English to write essays, at which he thought I showed some ability. He was a Scot, and I have always remembered his looking up from an essay of mine, he was reading, and saying, in his Doric voice, with an expression of delight 'Hist! It's an epigram!' He then read aloud to my fellow internees some rather feeble but snappy sentence that I had written. It was almost the only word of commendation that I had earned throughout the lengthy days of my education.

In the world outside, the usual calm prevailed, and only artificial clouds or smoke-screens seemed to darken the horizon. The papers supported or denounced the proposed curbing of the power of the House of Lords. Political excitement, they told us, 'ran high', but against the more genuine tension of later periods, it seems like a switchback, a *montagne russe* compared with Mount Everest. Little seemed to happen. King Edward still reigned. Everything was calm—yet people began to talk of war, and one of *Pélissier's Follies*, dressed if I remember rightly as a charwoman, sang a popular chorus, which ran,

'There'll be no wo'ar
As long as there's a king like good King Edward,
There'll be no wo'ar,
For 'e 'ates that sort of thing!

Mothers needn't worry
As long as we've a king like good King Edward.
Peace with 'Onner
Is his Motter
So God S'ive the King.'

It seemed unlikely that the great historic calm would break, why should it? If Germany went to war—and no other foe was to be seen—she would gain nothing. And the world now recognized that it was governed solely by the wish for economic welfare . . . The prospect of an army career seemed pointless.

I saw little of such friends as I had possessed before this time, for, perhaps owing to the punitive nature of the establishment, holidays were as rare as must be those from Borstal, and never seemed to coincide with holidays at other places, such as Eton; to which my brother had now passed. But I contrived to see a certain amount of him, motoring over to Windsor from time to time to meet him. When I did so, if possible, I avoided passing through Eton itself, so much did it depress my spirit. Moreover, I had, to my surprise, succeeded in making a new friend outside my savage surroundings: though in a most barbarous locality: for among the relations with whom, a year or two before, my great-aunt Blanche Sitwell had put me in touch, was Lady Chetwode—the grand-daughter of her eldest sister, Lady Combermere. And in the months of which I write, Star Chetwode had, by her kindness and charm and gaiety, done much to alleviate the dullness and misery of my existence, for she was living in Aldershot near-by; where her husband, now Field Marshal Lord Chetwode, O.M., was commanding his regiment, the 19th Hussars. She had a most unusual zest for life; a quality which found its expression in the laughing quickness of her words, and she seemed able, even, to civilize a house in barracks in Aldershot, joining it to the contemporary world outside.

During my first term, at the crammer, I was allowed too, to go away for a few days to pay a short visit to Bath to my grandmother Sitwell, who had taken a house in Royal Crescent. Now eighty, she had not begun to fail yet, and was able to drive round the town, and show me some of it. She, herself, had not seen it, since the days when, as a child, she had stayed there with her parents; at which distant period, there had been old people still residing there, who remembered Bath in the eighteenth century. I was

amazed at the beauty of the city, so much more complete, even today, when it has suffered bombing at the hands of the Germans and devastation by one of the most Philistine Councils in England, than was any city in Italy, more beautiful than Vicenza was, because more solid, more anchored to the earth than that papier-mâché dream of an antique world as it should be. It was November, and hills and fields, and the sun itself had, it seemed, clothed themselves in the brightest pheasant feathers, and the grey city, disposed with such grace upon the various slopes, appeared to exist within a globe of opal. I felt at once, as any stranger must, the strangeness, the ancient life and order of the place, and for the first time comprehended an important fact; that all European cities for their fullest flowering, need a Roman foundation.

The summer before I went to my crammers, I was, as I have said, in continual disgrace at home. I suppose all this time I must have been very much attached to my father, or I could not have been so wretched. My self-respect had entirely perished; for of what use was I, if my father so little esteemed me? After all, he was the most intelligent and learned person of his generation who was within my range, the most intellectually developed and nervously equipped. But my feeling for him must, within the space of a year or two, have very much altered, until, resembling in truth for once my relative whom I have mentioned, the sight of his hand-writing on an envelope would make me feel ill for an entire day. The state of mind to which I was reduced already, persuaded me almost to dislike my home, where every tree and vista seemed to re-echo my father's voice. Sometimes, though, I would, nevertheless, hide in the garden with Sacheverell; but he, albeit he invariably took my side, seemed at this period more popular than I was, with the family . . . so for the most part, I remained in my bedroom. It was high up, and no one would climb all those stairs to look for me—and, another advantage, I could see for myself, through the open window, what was happening.

The garden was in gala this year. Over the rounded top of an ancient holly, that grew against one of the angles of the house, where it jutted forward, the lawns lay spread in their richest, fullest beauty. The hedges had grown and were by now substantial, and the whole design, the counterpoint of bright mown grass and deep shade, of water and of trees, had settled down, and

looked as if it had existed always. This year, within the mysterious fullness of their setting, this year, in the ultimate Edwardian summer, the flowers had attained a peculiar richness typical of the epoch, for Lutyens's old friend and mentor, Miss Jekyll, had been sent the plan of the garden beds by my father and had issued her decrees for them; in one part, they were to be filled only with blossoms of blue and orange and lemon-yellow, in another with French eighteenth-century blues and pinks. The heads of dahlias and zinnias and carnations and roses were heavier and more velvety than in the previous decade, and the scent of the box-hedges, and of the various flowers was wafted up to the window, while at dusk the fragrance of the tobacco-plants and the stocks became overwhelming, seemed almost as strong as that of the tuberoses in their tall vases in the drawing-room, or of the bowls of stephanotis and gardenias. But now, in the day, the eye followed the gleam of water, from fountain and pool to the lake below, on the surface of which the weed showed here and there in wide, moon-gold patches, the weed supplying a backing to the glint of the water, as quicksilver does to a mirror; and beyond, rising through layers of sun and mist, which exaggerated the height of the hills, could be distinguished the distant bulk of Bolsover, seeming more a cliff or a precipice than a castle, and of Hardwick with its triple towers. Set, tumbling at curious angles on these heights, villages, no doubt hideous in themselves, showed at this distance the miniature blue perspective of Italian hill towns. . . . But I heard people talking. . . . Peering out cautiously, I observed my father peacocking about on the lawn, among an imported bevy of sycophantic females. He was wearing a grey wide-awake hat, a grey suit and had, slung round him, a pair of binoculars. He was pointing with a stick towards the horizon, stabbing it, as it were. His voice, very clear and decisive, but rather thin, floated up to the window. 'All that belongs to me!' he was saying, in answer to a question, and, with a final stab 'What we want there is just a cascade between the distant trees. Nothing looks so well, or points a view so aptly as falling water! Not everyone can manage it—but it's quite easy for me.' And he added, confidentially, with a little smile of self-congratulation, 'Between ourselves, I have over two miles of lead piping up my sleeve!' The Bevy looked impressed, I thought, by this clever but unexpected piece of legerdemain.

The Bevy had succeeded to, and replaced, the Fun Brigade, and was much more heterogeneous in its composition. All the members of the Fun Brigade had come of the same race, class and creed, and, in a large sense, of the same family. Their interests, if limited in scope, had been identical. No one belonging to it had been capable of understanding or admiring my father's imaginative creations. Further, though so pliable in other ways, yet the whole body was resolute in that not one member of it was willing to try to find favour with the master of the house by applauding him in this direction. *Espirit-de-corps* frowned on so great an outlay of money on things one could neither kill, eat, wear nor ride. Thus, when my father with pride showed to these people the lake he had made, the dam in the Eckington wood that was now being dug out, or propounded some new, still more grandiose scheme, they merely smiled wistfully, unconvincingly, while quickly calculating how much it had—or would—cost, and how many pheasants could have been reared, how many foxes torn to pieces, for that sum of money. . . . What waste! . . . So they would only comment 'How neat!' 'How weird!' or 'Isn't it *killing*?' in the token phraseology of the day. (Indeed, he seemed to be able to obtain no response from anyone; for when he had lately observed a superannuated collier watching the digging in the woods, and had asked him 'Are you thinking of the fishing there will be?' the old man had replied gloomily, 'No, Sir George—I was thinking what a wunnerful lot o' suicides there'll be in that blinking pool.')

My father needed more than this. Just as I have confessed that I require flattery in order to work at my best, so did he, for the most perfect evocation of vista or torrent. For this reason, for this purpose, the Bevy had supplanted the Fun Brigade, and now reigned at Renishaw in the summer months. It possessed three or four main props, such as Madame Amboise, Miss Camber-Crawshaw and Miss Fingelstone, who could be relied on to lead the whole company in admiration of what he was doing—and, for the rest, there were, as we have seen, the wives of former supporters in Scarborough, people for whom, for one reason or another, he used to say he felt sorry, adding with a somewhat gracious air, and the particular gesture of his hand, descending in stages, and with a slight flutter, that always accompanied it, 'We ought to show them a little kindness.' But, as I have said, immured

in his tower, he now felt really a great need for feminine sympathy as well as for flattery, and he could rely on the Bevy to produce it, so much of it, as it were, for so many days' visit, in the same way that prostitutes provide love by the hour.

Madame Amboise, plump summary of her race and epoch, was in quite a different category from the chorus, whose names, even, she effected never to be able to learn. She was much more cultivated and intelligent, and at the same time much more absurd. An enormous Russian, of middle age, with thick, white hair piled up like meringues, and a complexion of palest lilac, in the manner of many of her fellow-countrymen, before the Revolution, she suffered from a dilated soul, and was always eager to tell you of its symptoms. But her interests were by no means confined to these, for she was faintly tainted, too, with European culture of *l'Art Nouveau* period, and further, she seemed to be particularly at home in a world, imperceptible to others, that lay precariously unbalanced, midway between politics and the psychic. She carried about with her, moreover, an atmosphere of political scare, bringing with her into this calm, Edwardian scene, a premonitory breath of the coming great disasters that were already being prepared on the golf-courses. In consequence, the comfortable did not enjoy talking to her; it was as though a tramp in rags had entered the drawing-room and sat down. They were obliged to ask themselves, 'Can there be anything in what she says?'—but only for the moment. Fortunately for their peace of mind, she was so patently ludicrous in other directions—as are so many other prophets once they stray from their precise dominion—that it was soon possible for the inhabitants of the drawing-room to reassure themselves, dismissing doom with a light titter. She was ridiculous, they said: and this was true. But she could not, of course, be expected to recognize it: or that the creaking machinery of her charm, the golden net of her recollections, made her still more absurd. She aimed at creating an effect, and she succeeded. More than on her beauty, she relied on her charm, her voice, and, above all, her sympathy, which she was always ready to dispense, and which was so thick that, as though she were a medium producing ectoplasm, one could almost see it. She liked, too, to darken the background against which she displayed herself, with talk of her hard life, and she would insinuate the existence of some great political mystery

which had imbued even her childhood with dark tones. When other children had ridden donkeys on the sands, she had sleighed behind a reindeer over the drear Siberian snows—or so she gave one to understand.

Born into intellectual circles in Moscow, she had, in fact, spent her youth in the best tea-merchant and international *milieu* in that city. As soon as she had grown up, her family had taken her to Paris, where she had met and finally married the son of Amboise, the painter, and friend of Ary Scheffer. But the mists of the past had swallowed this rather nebulous figure. (Later I found out in what fashion.) Now it was the time of *Il Fuoco*, D'Annunzio's famous novel, and I think Madame Amboise, in spite of her northern origin, saw the whole of life through his eyes, rather than through those of a Russian novelist.¹

Be that as it may, in the course of a few decades, her life had opened up in the directions natural to her. She had specialized as the confidant and friend of all minor royalties of artistic leanings and unorthodox views, and used to sit in the loggia of the palace at Sinaia, listening to Carmen Sylva reading her own poems. She had also drifted into the position of becoming mistress of a rich Englishman, a friend of King Edward's. He was one of those strangely prominent figures, half-politician, half-journalist, whose semi-inspired and pompous bungling, and easily-disavowed statements of policy, marred the diplomacy of the opening years of the century, and whose continual interference in foreign affairs constituted one of the chief factors that promoted the First World War. This great love of hers, though on her side permanent, had after a year or two degenerated into a chronic state of guerrilla warfare: but this in no way caused her to feel any sense of humiliation, and she would talk freely, and as though they were matters of romance, of the various ruses and stratagems she had employed, and of the cunning devices by which she had secreted herself in his house, and the promptness with which his wife had discovered them and flung her out of it. These stories, combined with her friendships, and her position as the discarded mistress of one of these mysterious beings, lama-like in the diplomatic sphere, and

¹ At that time, stories of D'Annunzio's amatory exploits circulated throughout the cultured drawing-rooms of Europe, as, one hundred years previously had the tales of Byron's adventures. In this respect, as in others, no one has replaced the great Italian writer.

an architect of the recently established but still rickety *Entente Cordiale*—which showed all the well-known signs of Sir Titus Tittlebyte's workmanship, in that it was neither an alliance nor not one—afforded her still an occasional place at a luncheon, though never at a dinner-table, in Paris. There she had for many years led an existence full of incident, both psychic and material—though the material incidents had of latter years been of a rather negative kind; confined to these snubs, booby-traps and being ejected from her most ingenious hiding-places. So she came to us, to find peace, as she said—or, perhaps, merely because for the moment she had nowhere else to go. For hours, if she could find one of us to listen to her, she would talk in her smooth, slow, rather deep and evenly accentuated voice. Sometimes, she would be very confiding. “Madame Amboise, Hélène, may I call you?”, D’Annunzio said to me, when last I saw him, “It is not for your beauty that I love you, though that too is unusual, but for the so-velvety bloom of your voice; call me by my name, call me *Gabriele*, for I love to hear you weave the sound of it upon your lips: yours is the Voix d’Argent, the Voix d’Or, the Voix entre Chien et Loup!” Still with the dagger turning in her heart—for she dearly loved Sir Titus (but then so, unfortunately, did his wife)—she would talk to my father of Rodin and of Lalique, until he began to entertain a new project—which never, of course, materialized—of having fountains of glass designed for him. ‘It would amuse the members of the golf-club, if we put them on the course,’ he remarked to me.

The first time I had seen Madame Amboise was about a year before, when my mother took my sister, my brother and myself—aged respectively twenty, fifteen and ten—to see her in a hotel in London. We waited for her in a room which was called the *Reading Room*, though plainly no one had ever read a line in it, and there was nothing to read except a dusty trade-journal and thin pamphlets on New Spelling and Judge Rutherford’s Religion. For the rest, there were a few dry but clotted ink-wells, a few rusty, sticky nibs that seemed to have been dipped in liquid hair, a few closed blotters, with neither writing-paper, nor blotting-paper, and some visitors sitting in green and creaking wicker chairs. At last a heavy footfall sounded, and Madame Amboise advanced through the open door, clothed like a matador in a trailing cloak of scarlet velvet. She glided towards us as though in

a trance, as though not seeing the faces round her, but only ours. From a distance away, still, sounded that memorable and mellifluous voice.

‘Ah! my friend, my friend, I, Hélène Amboise, have had my love betrayed for a young girl of seventeen! Écoute! He has introduced her to his wife and family.’

She would have liked often to have talked to my mother about her soul, but on the only occasion she had attempted it, my mother had listened most patiently, and at the end had counselled the taking of a strong liver-pill; a remedy that she prescribed for every ill, moral, physical or mental, and this advice had discouraged Madame Amboise. With my father, she had soon realized, too, that it was equally impossible to talk on such matters, because, as though he were a character in a Chekhov play, he would, if the subject were not to his taste, carry on a conversation, apparently in answer to what was said, albeit in reality bearing no relation to it and existing on a totally different subject and level. Thus while the poor Russian lady would be diagnosing the mysterious symptoms of her soul, he would reply with tender details concerning garden furniture in Byzantine times, or explanations of some pedigree of the Twelfth Century. Therefore, her feelings pent up in this fashion, Madame Amboise would wait and, if she found my sister alone, would discuss for hours the state of the interesting invalid pent within her large hyperborean body. She would have liked to consult Sacheverell on the matter—he was now twelve—but he gave her no encouragement, being intent only on asking her a million questions about her native Russia. Besides, he did not like her, for, notwithstanding her pining, her soul, and the snubs and humiliations she had suffered, she was inclined ‘to be bossy’, as Henry said. She liked to manage everybody and everything. But when one day she said smoothly to Sacheverell, ‘If I were you, I should change my suit before tea’, she received the uncompromising reply ‘I daresay you would—but *I wouldn’t!*’ To me she talked not only about her soul, but about her past life, of which I learnt now in many details. One day, for example, she told me, in slow, low, hollow tones of her husband and his fate. ‘Monsieur Amboise was thirty years older than I, a young girl, and when after two years he retired permanently to the Asylum—his delusion being that everywhere he went, he was haunted by the sound of my so

beautiful voice—I mourned him as a father, rather than as a husband.’ . . . At other times, she discussed the future of the world. Very clearly, through her clouds of psycho-idealism, she saw looming the coming war. Indeed she was one of the few persons I know who perceived it—but then she had been privileged for years to watch her friend Sir Titus Tittlebyte at work, preparing it.

Though she was prone to interfere, Madam Amboise was also very kind and friendly, willing to enter into the spirit of anything, and I remember an old friend of my family, Eve Fairfax, and my brother and myself, inducing her to roll down a steep grass slope; it was as though a mountain were descending. Her rendering of English, too, was a great joy, and often supplied a welcome touch of low comedy. Thus, as I write, an effective, if—to make use of a former Bloomsbury colloquialism—‘rather music-hall’ sentence of hers comes back to me. After the fashion of many cultivated foreigners, she made rather a point of being frightened by domestic animals: and, on the occasion to which I refer, she had been for a walk in the park at Renishaw when a frolicsome young heifer had crossed her path. Accordingly she returned to the house at once, and, looking very large and plainly out of breath, entered the drawing-room where my sister, my brother and I were sitting, and remarked in that velvet voice, the sound of which had earned the famous encomium from D’Annunzio, but which was now punctuated at frequent intervals by a sound like an engine letting off steam, ‘My friends, I have met a bull-child in the park—and he has put me into pants. Since then, I am in them always!’ She liked to sit for hours in the garden, holding over her head a parasol with a coloured lining that, under the sun’s play, caused hot, Renoir-like tints and tones to pass over her countenance. But she still saw herself as an enchantress, still felt youthful under the mountains of fat which the years had deposited upon her form. She did not, even though she liked to emphasize of how graceful and sprightly she had been as a girl, really believe, I think, that she had much altered.

‘When I was eighteen,’ she used to say, ‘and my mother took me to walk in the Tuileries Gardens, people would turn round and stare, and I would hear them say “Look! See her! What a lark, what a lark!”’

Though Madame Amboise spent as much of the day as she could

sitting out, and talking, or going round the garden with my father, listening to him unrolling his schemes, and was never to be seen writing a letter, yet she invariably received a large post—thick envelopes, heavy, and with several foreign stamps on them.

‘It’s a rum go,’ Henry would remark to me, ‘every day the old Russian grampus gets those letters—and always the same number, seventeen. And it’s my belief the handwriting on all of them is the same, though it looks different, and the envelopes are different shapes. . . No one could ever write on the number of pages that’s in ‘em. It’s too much, altogether. Nobody’d have the time—let alone the wish. It’s overdoing it, and them foreigners are a lazy lot, too. . . No, you heed my words, Sir, *there’s a mystery somewhere!*’

I did not pay much attention to what he said. Besides, Madame Amboise would take her letters up to her room, when they arrived, and after reading them in seclusion for an hour—which seemed, considering their length, a very reasonable time to take over it—would descend again, with a visible aura of glory, of international news, round her, and proceed to distribute scraps of information as if feeding the birds.

‘Natasha de Roquefort—she was a Keschinsky—writes from her château near Tours; the harvest has been wonderful, and if war comes, will prove a great support.’

‘Marguérite de Sedan tells me in her letter that a German spy, wearing a *pickelhaube*, has been found hiding in a *Pavilion d’Amour* at the end of the garden, on their estate in Burgundy. He had a semaphore with him, and had cut off the little fingers of all the children in the neighbourhood.’

‘Melincourt writes that war has been postponed until after the winter.’

‘Sir Titus Tittlebyte says that Madame Caillaux has warned him that war is near.’

So, the tape unrolled itself upon the news-machine.

It was a year or two before the truth came out and Henry was proved to be right. . . One summer, when Madame Amboise was leaving us to pay a series of visits to friends in France, she asked a fellow guest in the house, whom she had known previously, whether she would mind addressing and posting every day seventeen envelopes—already stamped—to the various addresses. It did not matter, Madame Amboise said, what was put inside so

long as it was bulky enough—anything would do, book catalogues, old newspapers, anything!

‘But why seventeen?’

‘Because, child, it is my lucky number. Besides, to live in the world, it is necessary, absolutely necessary, to receive every day a large post. Then I can give my hosts the news from England.’

‘But surely not addressed in the same handwriting?’ her intended accomplice persisted.

‘That does not matter in the least,’ Madame Amboise replied, ‘though there is nothing, my friend, to prevent you from using a different nib for each envelope, if so you wish. It will not be a great charge, and I, Hélène, will pay.’

Alas, in the end, poor Madame Amboise reached a place where she could neither give nor receive news. The war, which she had so long foreseen, nevertheless caught her unawares. In August 1914, she was taking a cure at an Austrian watering place, and had been swept off to an internment-camp—the same in which her countryman, Nijinsky, found himself. And in my mind’s eye, I see her, still intent on her soul, and on her love, following the great dancer about, and telling him in her ‘so velvety’ voice of her experiences. . . . Moreover, she could never bear to be left out of things—‘I, too, I, Hélène, am a dancer,’ she will have said, ‘D’Annunzio said to me one day “Hélène, your words are like a ballet, you dance with the sound of your lips”’ . . . Nijinsky’s mind in any case was beginning, like Monsieur Amboise’s, to fail, and Madame Amboise died in the camp in 1915.

These sad days, however, were still in the future, and at the moment, as I looked out of my window, she was bumping and flapping about the lawn with my father. . . . On his right came Miss Camber-Crawshaw, leader of another contingent of the Bevy. One of several sisters, she belonged to the superannuated dairy-maid type, and possessed a voice that, like a mill, ground silence into its component parts. She had joined up in the first place as a friend of my mother’s, but half-way through her career had changed sides and become a Yorkshire intellectual and esthete, eager to support my father’s every plan. . . . Beyond Madame Amboise, walked, in a flutter or scurry of sweet-pea or pastel-coloured scarves and chiffons, the wife of a doctor from

Scarborough; kind, innocent, really nice, while beyond Miss Camber-Crawshaw, followed Miss Fingelstone, who made a very different impression.

Little in stature, but plump, Miss Fingelstone belonged plainly, by shape of eye, nose and chin, to the lesser birds of prey; was most like, perhaps, to a small, well-nourished sparrowhawk. Her brown hands, too, resembled claws, but were hidden by grey suède gloves. Just as such a bird for its own purposes has developed its own ingenious form of camouflage, so this little old lady, when she walked in the garden, always wore a black mantilla, to soften the lines of her musty face, flecked with feather-like markings, the colour of liver. And when, as occurred some years later, I occupied a room next hers, and was obliged to listen all night to her most individual snoring, that seemed to follow its own hideous rules of climax and susurrant diminuendo, I used to lie awake wondering whether this music, too, might not be contrived of her volition and design, calculated solely, like the stertorous breathing of the owl, to deceive the mice, on whom, she, in reality unsleeping, intended suddenly to pounce. Similarly she could pour over her watchful eyes, as hard as olives, a film of oil that, as it were, magnified their apparent limpid plausibility, and drew mice toward them, as a lamp attracts mosquitoes. (I have never seen such oily eyes.) For the same reason, perhaps, she liked to encourage among those acquainted with her the belief that she resembled, physically, Queen Victoria, because this erroneously provided her for the perfect moral background against which to work her schemes, and to carry on her profession; which was to live in Venice on a basis of commissions extorted from any tradesmen who sold an article to a foreigner. From the local antiquaries, she reaped a particularly rich harvest: but no object, on a stall, or sold on the pavement, was too small in price to pay her toll. Palaces, flats, statues, furniture, hideous glass figures, provisions, boxes of matches, tortoise-combs, shawls, foreign newspapers, picture postcards of pigeons all yielded their proper percentage. For this, she was immensely respected, if not liked, by the Italians, and, in addition she knew all the foreigners who resided in the city, and soon became acquainted with all those who came to visit it. In order to accomplish this more easily, she had made herself into an expert—and she was by no means without brains—on various aspects of Venetian life in former times, likely

to attract foreigners, and wrote books on these subjects—a quantity of small, plump volumes. The books greatly attracted the mice. And if in a Venetian drawing-room a young girl were to ask a question about ancient customs in the city, or an undergraduate to propound a theory connected with them, someone there was certain to remark, ‘You must ask Miss Fingelstone. She’s sure to know all that there is to be known about it. . . What! You haven’t met her? Oh, you’d love her! Very strict and old-fashioned in her ideas—a real Victorian lady: but she knows everything about Venice.’ The subjects of her books possessed just that flat flavour of boredom, stately spiced with local sentiment, the titles just that alliterative ease upon the tongue, with every now and then, perhaps, a faint suggestion of innuendo—nobody would ever be certain whether conscious or unconscious—that appeals to English and American visitors. Among the better-known titles were—and still are—*Tears from the Bridge of Sighs; Titian and Trifles, A Causerie; Nights with the Doges; Glass-blowing in Murano; With Ruskin on the Rialto; Amblings with Aretino; A Treasury of Tintoretto; Routs and Ridottos; Tidings from Torcello; Gleanings from Goldoni; Venetian Courts and Courtesans* and *Byron—or Love on the Lido!*

As Miss Fingelstone’s fame had increased, she proceeded to turn a further penny—and at the same time to attract yet more mice—by giving public lectures on the same subjects. In fact, she was a clever and business-like old woman—and, when I tell the reader that my father’s bargains in furniture, decorative pictures, glass and china, wrangled over with their owners for days before he acquired them, in the end inevitably contributed their quota to her upkeep, it will be realized that she was dauntless and persevering, as well. . . She was, when I first met her, already an old woman, and lived to be very ancient. Possessing a certain degree of real intellect and ability, as she grew older she became desperately eager to ‘keep up’. And it was because of this, that, after the First German World War, when my father was past sixty, and when either the sparrow hawk had grown decrepit or the mice more wary, and she had come to stay with us in Tuscany for a rest, I heard between her and my father a fragment of conversation which has always remained with me . . . She sat next him at dinner the first night of her stay, and not having seen him since 1914, inquired:

D

'I meant to ask you, Sir George, what do you think of Freud and his theories?'

'Nothing, Miss Fingelstone, nothing whatsoever.'

'And of Einstein, Sir George?'

'Nothing—nothing at all.'

With such ease can great territories of the human spirit be abolished.

Even at that age, Miss Fingelstone was still active, and now, below me in the garden, she was advancing at great speed behind my father and his rout of ardent-eyed admirers. . . . As I watched, I could not help seeing that the Bevy did not really understand their job. My father liked still to be alone, except at moments. They haunted him overmuch. Though at times he developed this craving for sympathy, by now it had been satisfied. He was so eager to be in his study, again in his familiar world of knights and men-at-arms, of oubliettes and gothic, antique gaieties, of raps-over-the-knuckles to those ways he did not approve, and hints on practical matters to the practical, of mazy climbing in genealogical trees, and hours spent in medieval Aleppo, that he was now walking towards the house almost at a run. (He always walked fast, taking rather short steps, with a hardly perceptible inward action of the left foot.) But the Bevy did not know how to take their cue, or how to give it. They merely doubled their own pace. Now they were sweeping across the lawn in echelon, towards the house, my father still leading by a long head. Suddenly he stopped, seized his field-glasses, swung round and surveyed through them the horizon. Only Madame Amboise appeared glad of the rest, for he had forced the pace, and she was plainly 'in pants' again. The rest of the Bevy waited and stirred uneasily. . . . Had he forgotten they were there, they wondered. It might be awkward: for sometimes, in moods of abstraction, he seemed hardly to recognize them or know who they were. They examined one another's dresses, scrutinizing them with a minute, side-long attention, bit by bit. Then, at last, he turned, and spoke, his words floating, clear and distinct, up to my window.

'The colliery over there has ceased working: you see the great square building at the side. Now that the lease has lapsed, I propose to turn it into a Triumphal Arch—just break through the middle, knock it out, and stucco the remainder! One would have double twisted pillars, each side, as they would in Italy, and a *stemma*

above.' Then, after a moment's pause to receive the Bevy's astonished acclamations, he added, 'I only hope that Osbert will appreciate all that I'm doing for him—I moved that mound three yards further to the west last year, Miss Fingelstone, and pulled and dragged the two old yew trees—but he seems to show no aptitude for anything!'

★ ★ ★

It was after these holidays, during my first term at the crammer's that my father bought the Castle—or rather half of it—in which in later years he was to live, thereby substituting for farce, with moments of tragedy, the purest *Commedia dell'Arte*.

He had been motoring with Miss Fingelstone, an Italian, a rival bird of prey, who was called Barone Vicellino, and another friend, an Englishman, all of whom were accompanying him from Florence to Siena, where they were to be his guests. The driver took the wrong road, and the motor then broke down beneath the walls of an immense old castle. (Sometimes, since, I have wondered whether it might not have been a diplomatic breakdown—organized by Miss Fingelstone or the Baron.) On the terrace above, the cellar doors were open, and the peasants could be seen treading the grapes, for it was the season of the vintage. While the driver was trying to mend his machine, my father walked round, outside the walls, through vineyards, to the other side where stood the garden entrance. Upon the high rusticated piers that rose, one on each side of a seventeenth-century gate of wrought-iron, stood not the usual beautiful Italian garden statues of stone or lead, but two figures rather small for their position, and made, he perceived under the blotches of golden lichen and stains of time—or perhaps of fire—of white marble. Both represented men in togas, one had a beard; the other figure had lost its head. Yet, dry in execution and formal as they were, these two statues proved to be infinitely romantic in their history, symbols and remnants of a forgotten episode in history, that catalogue of aggressions to which the passage of time adds beauty and poetic justice.

The family which had settled here, round the central tower, in the eleventh century, was called Acciaiuoli, and from here, its members had set out in the thirteenth century to conquer, first Malta, and then Corinth and Athens; in which two cities

they had reigned for a century and more. Their chief residence was the castle they had built of antique fragments upon the Acropolis at Athens, and the ruins of which continued to stand there until the beginning of the last century. They, doubtless, were the Dukes of Athens in whose realm Shakespeare laid the scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They possessed, too, a castle upon the Acropolis at Corinth, and the skeleton of this crumbling rock fortress still rose above the cliff when last I saw Corinth, in 1935. . . Eventually, some eighty years before the taking of Constantinople the Turks suddenly made an onslaught upon Athens, and captured it, alleging as the reason for the attack the notorious cruelty of the Acciaiuoli sovereigns to their subjects. Then the deposed Dukes of Athens went back to their Tuscan home, bringing with them these two classical statues, of a rather bad epoch, all that was left to them of their famous realms. And three centuries later, when Cardinal Acciaiuoli had added to the castle, and modernized it making the ramparts into garden terraces, and adding a theatre where his plays could be performed, he had erected the two statues at the entrance. . . Now the vast house had already belonged to strangers for some fifty years, the great rooms had been subdivided, and the place had become a village of nearly three hundred people, with whole families of peasants, and its own shops, bakers, shoemakers, tailors. . . . Yet curiously little damage had been done; the terracotta figures in the Grotto had been broken by children throwing stones at them, it was true; but even the missing head of the Greek statue—which turned out to be that of Aesculapius—was found a year or two later, buried some three feet in the ground, just underneath its stone pillar.

My father announced to me his purchase in the letter that follows, written about a month before my seventeenth birthday.

‘My dearest Osbert,

You will be interested to hear that I am buying in your name the Castle of Acciaiuoli (pronounced Accheeyawly) between Florence and Siena. The Acciaiuoli were a reigning family in Greece in the thirteenth century, and afterwards great Italian nobles. The castle is split up between many poor families, and has an air of forlorn grandeur. It would probably cost £100,000 to build today. There is a great tower, a picture-gallery with frescoed portraits of the owners, from a very early period, and a chapel

full of relics of the Saints. There are the remains of a charming old terraced garden, not very large, with two or three statues, a pebblework grotto and rows of flower-pots with the family arms upon them. The great saloon, now divided into several rooms, opens into an interior court where one can take one's meals in hot weather, and here, over two doorways, are inscriptions giving the history of the house, most of which was rebuilt late in the seventeenth century as a "house of pleasure". The owners brought together there some kind of literary academy of writers and artists. All the rooms in the Castle have names, it seems, as the Sala of the *Gonfalonieri*, the Sala of the *Priori*—twelve of the Acciaiuoli were *Gonfalonieri* and twelve, I think, *Priori*—the Chamber of Donna Beatrice, the Cardinal's Chamber, the library, the museum. There seem to have been bathrooms, and every luxury. We shall be able to grow our own fruit, wine, oil—even champagne! I have actually bought half the Castle for £2,200: the other half belongs to the village usurer, whom we are endeavouring to get out. The ultimatum expires today, but I do not yet know the result. The purchase, apart from the romantic interest, is a good one, as it returns five per cent. The roof is in splendid order, and the drains can't be wrong, as there aren't any. I shall have to find the money in your name, and I do hope, my dear Osbert, that you will prove worthy of what I am trying to do for you, and will not pursue that miserable career of extravagance and selfishness which has already once ruined the family.

Ever your loving father,
George R. Sitwell.'

This letter puzzled me: for I was not conscious of having been extravagant. I had not bought a castle big enough for three hundred people—not even half of one. I was not proposing to make my own champagne.

MARTIN TURNELL

NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS-XI

STENDHAL-I

'Plus on admire Stendhal et plus on est intelligent.'

André Suarès

I

M. BEYLE'S PRESS CONFERENCE

STENDHAL has defeated his critics more completely than any other great novelist. It seems strange at first that this should be so. For no other writer has been more helpful and accommodating or has provided more information about himself than Stendhal has done in the pages of his voluminous *Journal* and in his many autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writings. He not only knows all the answers, but seems to have gone out of his way to anticipate the questions that an admiring posterity would most have wished to ask him.

When I turn over the pages of the books he wrote, and of the books that have been written about him, I sometimes imagine that I am a spectator at a great Press conference. All the eminent European critics from Sainte-Beuve to M. André Gide are there. I see them with their heads bent seriously over their notebooks, glancing up from time to time to look at the fat little man on the platform or to ask him a question. 'What is the aim of life, M. Beyle?' asks one. The answers come pat: 'The pursuit of happiness.' 'What is the function of the novelist?' 'The study of the human heart.' 'What is the most reliable guide to life?' '*La lo-gique*', and we catch the famous drawl as he carefully separates the syllables.

The speaker warms to his work. The answers swell into a continuous stream which almost submerges the audience as he tells them of his admiration for the prose style of Montesquieu, his love of Mozart and Cimarosa, his recollections of the salon of Mme de Tracy, his campaigns and his voyages, and his views on divorce reform. When at last he pauses for breath, someone asks whether he knew the great La Fayette. 'Certainly. He was over sixty when I met him, but even at that age he was the most frightful old bottom-pincher in France.' One or two of the more

respectable critics begin to shuffle uneasily in their seats. An impudent young man at the back asks what M. Beyle thought of Mme X. There is a pause and a malicious gleam comes into his eye. 'Je l'ai eue un an de suite, six fois par semaine [celle-là].' A *frisson* goes round the assembly, and someone whispers: 'I told you this would happen. We really ought not to have come.' 'Will M. Beyle give us his views on impotence?' The speaker looks like the venerable figure of M. André Gide. M. Beyle is only too delighted. He plunges into a long discourse on *le fiasco*, happily brandishing an annotated copy of *de l'Amour*. Naturally he cannot resist telling us once again the shocking story of his adventure, or rather mis-adventure, with Alexandrine Petit.

When we look over the shoulders of the famous critics, we have to admit that the results are curious. Senator Sainte-Beuve, with his saturnine leer, remarks that M. de Stendhal's mind was essentially a critical one, and goes on to add, with his usual perfidy, that his characters 'are not living beings, but ingeniously constructed automata'. Professor Taine is writing an enthusiastic discourse on the importance of *le Rouge et le Noir* for experimental psychology. Professor Valéry has come to the conclusion that, boring as all novels undoubtedly are, this particular *novelist* is not without charm. 'In my view,' he writes at the close of his highly stimulating essay, 'Henri Beyle is much more a type of mind than a man of letters. He is far too much himself to be reduced to a writer.' Ramon Fernandez, 'the philosophical critic', tells us that 'the immense, the incalculable interest of Stendhal's work lies less in its intrinsic value than in the information that it provides about the respective characteristics of the autobiography and the novel'. There are a number of serious studies of *le Beylisme* and *le cas Stendhal*, some painstaking reconstructions of the itinerary of his many voyages and a few elegant trifles on 'Stendhaliens et Beylistes'; but with the exception of a capital essay by Paul Bourget, a useful book by Thibaudet and an admirable note on Stendhal's style by Charles Du Bos, there is comparatively little to help the reader to understand Stendhal's *novels*.

These essays, however, do help us to realize the nature of the difficulty. The reasons for Stendhal's elusiveness seem to me to be three: the personality of the man, his characters, and his style. The immense amount of information that he has given us about himself has not always been the great advantage that it should have

been. It has been a temptation to his critics to forget the novels and to concentrate on his psychology and the vagaries of his sexual life. One has the impression that Stendhal is at the centre of a charmed circle while his critics hover round and round, trying in vain to penetrate his secret.

Stendhal's characters are disconcerting because they reflect the personality of their creator. He was a highly unconventional person and he was very careful not to impose a specious unity on his characters. He displayed—and sometimes exaggerated—the contradictions of human nature because it was one of his aims to disturb his readers' complacency, to shock them out of conventional attitudes and encourage them to make a fresh approach to experience. It is for this reason that we often feel 'at sea', feel that there is nothing to hang on to in our reading.

Finally, there is his style. The day is long past when late Romantics like Pierre Louÿs could denounce Stendhal for writing like an *épicier* and stamp on his books in an outburst of childish fury. He is recognized today as a *prince du langage*, but he is a prince who is sometimes altogether too easy to read. His style seldom calls attention to itself. We never have the impression, as we so often do with Flaubert, that the novelist is standing at our elbow waiting to pluck our sleeve to make us stop and admire his carefully contrived effects. We glide happily from page to page, carried along by the sweep of the narrative or the tension of the drama, missing many of the shades and subtleties. It is only occasionally that a phrase stands out and compels us to pause and admire it:

'La demoiselle se pencha en dehors du comptoir, ce qui lui donna l'occasion de déployer une taille superbe. Julien la remarqua; toutes ses idées changèrent.'

In two sentences Stendhal achieves what any other writer would have done far less well in two pages of description and analysis. His two sentences express a physiological as well as a psychological reaction. In the first sentence, the girl seems suddenly to move towards Julien and the twist of her hips fixes his attention on her figure. Then, at the word *remarqu*, where another writer would have embarked on an elaborate description, Stendhal simply puts a semi-colon and leaves a blank. It is the only way of conveying the full violence of the physical impact which makes him catch his breath and produces a momentary blackout.

The last four words are, as Charles Du Bos pointed out, the exact equivalent of the blood rushing to his head.

He uses the same method in another sentence:

‘Julien atteignit un tel degré de perfection dans ce genre d’éloquence, qui a remplacé la rapidité d’action de l’empire, qu’il finit par s’ennuyer lui-même par le son de ses paroles.’

There is no analysis and no argument. Stendhal suppresses the intermediaries. Two worlds are suddenly juxtaposed—the world of action and the world of windbags—providing a very pertinent comment on contemporary France. The skill with which the words ‘qui a remplacé la rapidité d’action de l’empire’ are slipped into the sentence shows how completely integrated Stendhal’s vision was.

The scarcity of such sentences draws attention to another problem. It is very difficult to illustrate Stendhal’s quality by short extracts. His full flavour is only apparent in the longer scenes or, better, sequences, like the love affair between Julien and Mathilde, Fabrice at Waterloo, Fabrice in prison or Dr. Sansfin’s encounter with the washerwomen—the greatest scene of pure comedy that Stendhal ever wrote—at the beginning of *Lamiel*.

It remains to add that the subject of Stendhal is a vast one and that in a short study I have had to confine myself to a discussion of his autobiography and his two most famous novels.

II

‘LA VIE DE HENRI BRULARD’

On the night of 16 October 1832, the French consul at Civita-Vecchia was walking slowly homewards. He had been to a dull reception at the Embassy and he was brooding a little sadly over memories of his past life and over the thought that he would soon be fifty years old. ‘Qu’ai-je été, que suis-je?’ he murmured to himself. ‘Je serais bien embarrassé de le dire,’ he answered. The only thing to do was to put it all down in a book, though the last entry in that other autobiographical fragment, *Souvenirs d’égotisme*, was as recent as 4 July of the same year.

It was not until over three years later on 23 November 1835 that Stendhal settled down to write the book. *La Vie de Henri Brulard*¹ is a bewildering, tantalizing, repetitive work and like its

¹All my references are to M. Henri Martineau’s edition, *Le Divan*, two volumes, Paris, 1927.

predecessor it remained unfinished; but it occupies a special place in the Stendhal canon. The reason is evident when we turn to the writer's description of his method of composition:

'Je ne vois la vérité nettement sur la plupart de ces choses qu'en les écrivant en 1835, tant elles ont été enveloppées jusqu'ici de l'auréole de la jeunesse, provenant de l'extrême vivacité des sensations.

'A force d'employer des méthodes philosophiques, par exemple à force de classer mes amis de jeunesse par genres, comme M. Adrien Jussieu fait pour ses plantes (en botanique), je cherche à atteindre cette vérité qui me fuit' (I, pp. 29-30).

'Je n'ai que des images fort nettes, toutes mes explications me viennent en écrivant ceci, quarante-cinq ans après les événements' (I, p. 63).

'A côté des images les plus claires, je trouve des manques dans ce souvenir, c'est comme une fresque dont de grands morceaux seraient tombés' (I, p. 163).

Stendhal is not attempting to write a straightforward narrative in the manner of *Souvenirs d'égotisme* or noting down day to day impressions and reflections as he did in the *Journal*. *The act of writing is a method of psychological investigation*. He turns his mind towards the past and waits for the images to present themselves. He is a child standing in one of the rooms in his grandfather's house. He notices the position of the different pieces of furniture, then of the people who were present on a particular occasion. He cannot distinguish their features at first, but as he watches them they gradually come to life and he recognizes the members of his family or the family circle.¹ All these scenes are associated with some strong emotion—grief over his mother's death, anger with his father or his aunt. At this point, the work of *evocation* is complete; the writer sets to work to *analyse* the emotion which has kept the scene alive in his memory. It is only through analysis that he *appears*—he is very circumspect—to discover the inner meaning of the images and the significance of a particular scene for his own development. Nor should we overlook his statement that he is unable to evoke certain moments of his past life 'où j'ai senti trop vivement' because his very unusual sensibility is the clue to an understanding of the novels.

¹The diagrams which he drew on his manuscript were obviously a means of stimulating his mental processes and enabling him to fix the images.

This general account of his method is strikingly confirmed when he comes to the members of his family. The family circle and the atmosphere of his early life at Grenoble are described with remarkable vividness, but it is not this alone which makes the book unusual. 'Voilà les personnages du triste drame de ma jeunesse,' he writes in Chapter VII. *Henri Brulard* is much more like a novel than an autobiography. His relatives are not simply family portraits; they resemble the characters of a novel and they all have their special place in the pattern of Stendhal's life which unfolds before us.

There is the old grandfather, Henri Gagnon, to whom Stendhal was devoted, with his round, powdered periwig whose three rows of curls showed that the wearer was a doctor of medicine. Henri Gagnon is an eighteenth-century vignette and he represents the mellow side of the Enlightenment in Stendhal's own make-up. 'He was a sage in the manner of Fontenelle,' we are told, 'very polite about religion rather than a believer,' and very anxious to keep out of the feuds and quarrels which divided his household.

The other characters include Stendhal's great-aunt Elizabeth whose *âme espagnole*, as we shall see, had a decisive influence on his development; the 'terrible Aunt Séraphie' whom he calls *ce diable femelle*; his father, Chérubin Beyle, and, most important of all, his mother who died when he was seven.

His description of his affection for his mother is a classic example of the 'Œdipus complex':

'My mother, Madame Henriette Gagnon,¹ was a charming woman and I was in love with my mother . . . I was perhaps six years old when I was in love with her (1789), but my character was exactly the same as in 1828 when I was madly in love with Alberthe de Rubempré. . . . As far as the physical side of love was concerned, I was in the same position as Caesar would be over the use of cannon and small arms if he returned to the world. I should soon have learnt and at bottom it would not have changed my tactics in any way.

'I wanted to cover my mother with kisses and for her to have no clothes on. She loved me passionately and often kissed me; I returned her kisses with such fire that she often had to leave me.

¹She was the daughter of Henri Gagnon and the fact that he calls her by her maiden name is not without interest.

I abhorred my father when he came and interrupted our embraces. I always wanted to kiss my mother on the throat . . .

'She died in 1790 in the flower of her youth and beauty. She might have been twenty-eight or thirty' (I, pp. 41-2).

'*Là commence ma vie morale,*' adds Stendhal, and the words reveal the significance of his love for his mother. It was the direct cause of his loathing for his father¹ and Tante Séraphie of whom he paints a devastating portrait in which he underlines 'l'aigreur d'une fille dévote qui n'a pas pu se marier' and who was afflicted with 'le diable au corps'. 'Chance has never, perhaps, brought together two beings who were more fundamentally antipathetic to one another than my father and I,' he said (I, p. 92). In the diaries he commonly refers to him as *le bâtard*, and in *Henri Brulard* he does not scruple to suggest on several occasions that he seduced or was seduced by his sister-in-law, Séraphie.

Stendhal's antipathy did not remain a purely personal one. It led to a revolt not only against the stuffy, middle-class society of Grenoble, but also against the *convenances*² and against contemporary society as a whole. He himself was the first to realize the importance of his upbringing for his later development. 'My family', he wrote, 'were the most aristocratic people in the town. This meant that I became a fanatical republican on the spot' (I, p. 130). 'All the elements which compose the life of Chrysale³ have been replaced in my own case by romance. I believe that this speck in my telescope has been useful to me as a novelist. There is a sort of *bassesse bourgeoise* to which my characters could never succumb' (I, p. 134). 'I had, and still have, the most aristocratic of tastes,' he goes on in a passage whose humanitarian feeling we must all applaud; 'I would do everything in my power to ensure the happiness of the *peuple*; but I think that I would rather spend a fortnight of every month in prison than have to live with shopkeepers' (II, p. 56).

¹In another place he records the satisfaction with which he learnt from his great-aunt that his mother had never been in love with his father. 'Ce mot fut pour moi d'une portée immense. J'étais encore, au fond de l'âme, jaloux de mon père' (I, p. 174).

²Cf. 'Les *convenances* sont, comme les lois, destinées pour les gens médiocres et par des gens médiocres' (*Journal*, Ed. Debraye and Royer, V, Paris, 1934, p. 64).

³He was the *honnête homme* in *l'Ecole des femmes*.

Although Stendhal's revolt began as an emotional protest against his family, it seems to me to have developed into an attitude which was both logical and coherent. He was socially and intellectually out of place in the society of his time because he found the aristocracy, the middle classes and the proletariat equally intolerable. This stamps him as a patrician, and he dreamed, as others have done, of founding a new intellectual aristocracy.¹ His attitude bears a certain resemblance to Baudelaire's, but in reality it was far more extreme. He felt that he was not simply isolated, but absolutely *unique*. This meant that he could not expect his contemporaries to understand either himself or his books. He set to work to rationalize his position and to compensate himself for their neglect by turning his life into a private drama in which he played nearly all the parts:

'Sur ce tréteau privé', said Valéry, 'il donne sans relâche le spectacle de Soi-Même; il se fait de sa vie, de sa carrière, de ses amours, de ses ambitions très diverses, une pièce perpétuelle.'²

This accounts for his use of pseudonyms—scholars claim to have counted 171—and his preoccupation with 'the happy few'. Since he was unique, the only way of overcoming his isolation was to multiply his own personality, to create a number of fictitious selves who were bound to understand him, and to send out his books like letters in bottles in the hope that somewhere there might be a handful of people like himself who would appreciate them.

This attitude throws some light on the novels. All his principal characters—Octave de Malivert, Lucien Leuwen, Lamiel, Julien Sorel, Fabrice del Dongo—are people who like himself do not 'fit in'. In creating them, it seems to me that Stendhal was exploring the different reasons which prevented people from fitting in. It should be emphasized that he was concerned with *reasons* and not with *solutions*. He knew that there was no solution, and neither Julien's death nor Fabrice's withdrawal to his monastery is a solution.

A good deal has been written about Stendhal's philosophy, but it is easy to be misled by his omnivorous reading and wide interests.

¹I have discussed the patrician attitude in more detail in an article on Baudelaire called 'The Patrician in Politics' in the *Cornhill*, Summer 1946, No. 968.

²*Variété II*, Paris, 1930, p. 89.

'En général,' he said, 'ma philosophie est du jour où j'écris.' The first thing to realize is that he was not a systematic thinker and that he never used the novel to propound or to illustrate philosophical theories. His mind was formed by the study of the *philosophes*, and Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy seem to have remained an inspiration all his life; but he was very far from being the intransigent materialist for which he is sometimes taken. His grandfather was an ardent admirer of Voltaire. He used to take the young Stendhal to see a tiny bust of the philosopher which he kept in his study, and when Stendhal was very good he was allowed to touch the bust. He did not share his grandfather's admiration:

'Les écrits de Voltaire m'ont toujours souverainement déplu, ils me semblaient un enfantillage. Je puis dire que rien de ce grand homme ne m'a jamais plu' (I, pp. 36-7).

There is a still more striking criticism of the eighteenth-century thinkers in *Racine et Shakespeare*:

'L'âme ardente et tendre de Platon a senti des choses qui resteront à jamais invisibles à Condillac et gens de son espèce.'¹

I do not think that these criticisms are inconsistent with Stendhal's general outlook. Nor is it true that like Benjamin Constant he began with an uncritical admiration for the thinkers of the Enlightenment and turned against them in middle age. His attitude was consistent from the start and it can only be understood when we remember that (unlike Constant) he was essentially an *artist*. There are moments in the novels when his personal views—particularly his strong anti-clericalism—make his characters' behaviour unconvincing; but in his greatest work theory goes by the board and he surrenders himself completely to his sensibility.

Stendhal's character was dominated by two factors—the *logique* of the philosophers and the *espagnolisme* which he claimed to have inherited from his great-aunt. It is tempting, but misleading, to suppose that they were opposites and to imagine that there was a conflict between the two which resembled the conflict between *devoir* and *amour* in Corneille, particularly when we recall his great admiration for that master. Nothing could be further from the truth.

'Ma cohabitation passionnée avec les mathématiques [he said]

¹Paris, 1854, p. 97.

m'a laissé un amour fou pour les bonnes *définitions*, sans lesquelles il n'y a que des à peu près' (II, p. 202).

I think we can assume that in this passage 'mathematics' is the equivalent of 'logic', and it explains its function very clearly. There is nothing tyrannical about Stendhal's 'logic'; it does not seek, like Corneille's *raison*, to impose order on the unruly life of the senses. It is simply an instrument, a method of unravelling and registering the complex movements of his sensibility, which might not unreasonably be compared to the pattern or even to the wall on which he paints his fresco.

Espagnolisme is something far richer and more complex. It is a shorthand description of Stendhal's own sensibility. It includes his immense vitality, his admiration for the wild exuberance and the baroque extravagance of the sixteenth century and, finally, his extremely sensitive reactions to experience. When he writes of the country where he was born: 'J'apprends au lecteur que le Dauphiné a une manière de sentir à soi, vive, opiniâtre, raisonneuse, que je n'ai rencontrée en aucun pays' (I, p. 46), the three adjectives, *vive*, *opiniâtre*, *raisonneuse*—particularly the last—seem a good description of his own complexity.

The book also contains some illuminating examples of his personal mode of feeling:

"*Sa sensibilité est devenue trop vive*," he said of himself: "*ce qui ne fait qu'effleurer les autres, le blesse jusqu'au sang*."¹ Tel en vérité j'étais en 1799, tel je suis en 1836, mais j'ai appris à cacher tout cela sous l'ironie imperceptible au vulgaire . . . ' (II, p. 194).

His sensibility is at the root of his avid search for delicate sensations:

'J'ai recherché avec un sensibilité exquise la vue des beaux paysages; c'est pour cela uniquement que j'ai voyagé. Les paysages étaient comme un *archet* qui jouait sur mon âme, et des aspects que personne ne citait (la ligne de rochers en approchant d'Arbois, je crois, et venant de Dôle par la grande route, fut pour moi une image sensible et évidente de l'âme de Méthilde)' (I, p. 20).

A final example deserves particular attention because of its bearing on the novels:

'Je vois que la rêverie a été ce que j'ai préféré à tout, même à passer pour homme d'esprit' (I, p. 20).

¹ Italics in the text.

Stendhal was anything but a religious man, but the ideal described here is essentially a *contemplative* one. He sets his own stamp on the word *rêverie*. It has nothing in common with the quietism of the Romantics or with the mournful day-dreams of Flaubert's characters. It is, to use a theological distinction, an 'activity' and not a 'state'. It is as contemplatives, in a sense which has nothing to do with mysticism, that Stendhal's two most famous characters end their days.

I do not want to suggest that there was never any conflict between *logique* and *espagnolisme*. There were certainly moments in Stendhal's life and in his books when *espagnolisme* carried everything before it, when great gusts of emotion stretched his characters senseless on the ground. The point which needs emphasis is that *logique* and *espagnolisme* were the twin poles of Stendhal's own nature and of the nature of his characters. They are all capable of cold calculation, but they are all like their creator *âmes sensibles*. It is the combination of the two—'un amour fou pour les bonnes définitions' is a tell-tale phrase—which is the source of their extraordinary vitality and which makes them so immensely fascinating. In a striking definition, he once compared the novel to the violinist's bow which draws forth sounds from the violin that is the reader's soul. 'Logic' is a discipline in the same sense as the violinist's bow; neither more nor less.

III

'LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR'

The opening chapters of a novel by Stendhal must be read with the same care as the opening scenes of a comedy by Molière. They contain the essential clues to the understanding of the whole book. *Le Rouge et le Noir* begins with a description of the little town of Verrières in which the novelist displays his admirable sensibility:

'La petite ville de Verrières peut passer pour l'une des plus jolies de la Franche-Comté. Ses maisons blanches avec leurs toits pointus de tuiles rouges s'étendent sur la pente d'une colline, dont les touffes de vigoureux châtaigniers marquent les moindres sinuosités. Le Doubs coule à quelques centaines de pieds au-dessous de ses fortifications, bâties jadis par les Espagnols, et maintenant ruinées.'

The little town nestling among the hills, with its 'habitants plus paysans que bourgeois' and its 'jeunes filles fraîches et jolies' who

work in the mills, gives and is intended to give an impression of peacefulness. We must not overlook the 'fortifications'. In an earlier period, they had marked the limit reached by the invader. Nor is it without significance that they are 'ruined'. For Verrières will suffer from an 'invader' of another kind whose incursions will cause a considerable disturbance.

The novelist goes on to describe the industries of the place: the saw-mills, the manufacture of 'painted tiles' and nails. Then we are introduced to M. de Rênal, Mayor of Verrières:

'At the sight of him every hat is quickly raised. His hair is turning grey, and he is dressed in grey. He is a Companion of several Orders, has a high forehead, an aquiline nose, and on the whole his face is not wanting in a certain regularity: indeed, the first impression formed of it may be that it combines with the dignity of a village mayor that sort of charm which may still be found in a man of forty-eight or fifty. But soon the visitor from Paris is annoyed by a certain air of self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency mingled with a suggestion of limitations and want of originality. One feels, finally, that this man's talent is confined to securing the exact payment of whatever is owed to him and to postponing payment till the last possible moment when he is the debtor.'¹

It is not simply the portrait of an individual; it is the portrait of a class. For M. de Rênal is the symbol of the privileged classes—genteel on the surface, hard as nails underneath—in their ruthless struggle with the unprivileged.

No one who has read Stendhal's principal works will have failed to notice that he was obsessed with prisons, secret police and spies. The casual reference to 'fortifications' in the first paragraph of the book is caught up three pages later by a reference to 'walls':

'You must not for a moment expect to find in France those picturesque gardens which enclose the manufacturing towns of Germany; Leipzig, Frankfort, Nuremberg and the rest. In the Franche-Comté, the more *walls* a man builds, the more he makes his property bristle with stones piled one above another, the greater title he acquires to the respect of his neighbours.'

'Walls' is one of the focal words of the novel. They are in the first place the ramparts which separate the two worlds of the

¹In this and the four quotations which follow, I have used Scott Moncrieff's translation. The italics are mine.

privileged and the unprivileged. They are also the 'fortifications' which preserve the bourgeois world from the incursions of peasants and workers. In spite of their gentility and respectability, the privileged are far from being idle behind their fortifications; they wage a ceaseless war against those outside and are constantly thrusting their ramparts further forward and acquiring fresh territory:

'M. de Rênal's gardens, honeycombed with *walls*, are still further admired because he bought, for their weight in gold, certain minute scraps of ground which they cover. For example that sawmill, whose curious position on the bank of the Doubs struck you as you entered Verrières, and on which you noticed the name *Sorel* inscribed in huge letters on a board which overtops the roof, occupied, six years ago, the ground on which at this moment they are building the *wall* of the fourth terrace of M. de Rênal's gardens.'

At this point the two worlds represented by M. de Rênal and Sorel—Julien's father—face one another directly. The Mayor's victory was hardly won. He had to pay Sorel a fat price to move his factory, but, adds Stendhal ironically, he also had to pull strings in Paris to have the *public* stream which fed the sawmill turned.

The theme is pursued in the second chapter:

'Fortunately for M. de Rênal's reputation as an administrator, a *huge retaining wall*¹ was required for the public avenue which skirts the hillside a hundred feet above the bed of the Doubs. To this admirable position it is indebted for one of the most picturesque views in France. But, every spring, torrents of rainwater made channels across the avenue, carved deep gullies in it and left it impassable. This nuisance, which affected everybody alike, placed M. de Rênal under the fortunate obligation to immortalize his administration by a *wall* twenty feet in height and seventy or eighty yards long.'

Although the Mayor appears to be performing a public duty in constructing his 'huge retaining wall', it is not without substantial advantages to himself:

'The sun is extremely hot in these mountains; when it is directly overhead, the traveller's rest is sheltered on this terrace

¹ Italics in the text.

by a row of magnificent planes. Their rapid growth, and handsome foliage of a bluish tint are due to the artificial soil with which the Mayor has filled in the space behind his *immense retaining wall*, for, despite the opposition of the town council, he has widened the avenue by more than six feet. . . .

One of the central themes of *le Rouge et le Noir* is the 'class-war'. Stendhal's conception of it was much wider than that of modern political theorists, but his book is the story of a parvenu who succeeds in penetrating the 'walls' which protect the privileged and in attaching himself to a class to which he does not belong. He penetrates not only the walls of M. de Rênal's estate, but the walls of the seminary and of the Hôtel de La Mole. In the end, society takes its revenge. With the same ease with which it casts the simple Abbé Chélan outside its walls, it finally shuts Julien behind prison walls and executes him not for slaying, or attempting to slay, one of its members, but for trying to usurp its privileges.

We must turn now to the character of the parvenu. Stendhal uses a number of different methods of creating character, but one of the most important is the description of his chief character's effect on other people. We are told of Julien at the seminary:

'Julien avait beau se faire petit et sot, il ne pouvait plaire, il était trop différent.'

The Abbé Pirard says to him:

'Avec ce je ne sais quoi d'indéfinissable, du moins pour moi qu'il y a dans votre caractère, si vous ne faites pas fortune, vous serez persécuté; il n'y a pas de moyen terme pour vous.'

He fares no better in his own family:

'Objet des mépris de tous à la maison, il haïssait ses frères et son père; dans les jeux du dimanche, sur la place publique, il était toujours battu.'

The Marquis de La Mole says of him:

'Mais au fond de ce caractère je trouve quelque chose d'effrayant. C'est l'impression qu'il produit sur tout le monde, donc il y a là quelque chose de réel. . . .'

These observations reveal Julien from a number of different angles. We see him as he appeared to his proletarian family, to his fellow-seminarists, to his confessor and to aristocratic conservatives like M. de La Mole; but they have one thing in common. The *reader's* reactions are almost identical with those of the other

characters. We, too, find Julien 'different', 'indefinable', 'difficult to place', 'frightening'. Stendhal certainly intended that we should, and he himself completes the evidence by describing him as 'un homme malheureux, en guerre avec toute la société'. For Julien is an *étranger* or 'outsider' in the society of his time.

Now this conception of character is of capital importance in Stendhal's work, and something must be said of the *étranger* type and of the age which produced him. It is commonly assumed that there are resemblances between the Napoleonic age and our own, but it is easy to exaggerate them. In spite of revolution, war and devastation, the Europe which emerged from the Napoleonic wars was on the threshold of a great age of peace and plenty. At the same time, to a contemporary observer, it must have presented an appearance of considerable confusion. The Revolution had petered out in dictatorship; and dictatorship led not simply to monarchy, but to an extremely sordid, conventional and repressive monarchy. In politics, France was divided between conservatives and liberals, but we often find it difficult to distinguish between their policies which appear equally confused.

A sensitive observer like Stendhal was struck by the muddle and lack of vitality of this society—it is the constant burden of his writings—and it is precisely in these conditions that the *étranger* makes his appearance. He is the Janus-face who emerges in periods when the sensitive individual cannot identify himself with any of the different groups of which society is composed. For the *étranger* has no recognized mode of feeling. In spite of his intelligence and his extraordinary calculations, he is continually swinging from one extreme of feeling to another and back again. 'Chez cet être singulier', said Stendhal, 'c'était presque tous les jours tempête.'

The *étranger* is essentially an individualist at odds with society, but it must be recognized that he is an entirely new type in European fiction. He has little in common with the Romantic outcast or Flaubert's *ratés*, with Gide's *immoraliste* or Camus' 'outsider', who are all manifestations of a much more personal attitude. Stendhal's characters are the direct product of their age and are only comprehensible when seen in relation to it. They are left to work out their destiny in a chaotic society and their only supports are their own immense force of character and their own genius. In spite of their shortcomings, the way in which

they set about their task stamps their attitude as an heroic one. I think that we can go further than this and say that Julien Sorel is 'the modern hero'.

Stendhal's conception of character is an example of the way in which he discarded philosophical theories when they came into conflict with his artistic vision. The materialism implicit in the work of the philosophers whom he admired led logically to determinism, to the belief that character is nothing but the product of environment. It would be an understatement to say that Stendhal did not accept this view. *Le Rouge et le Noir* is based on the contrary view—on the view that genius is absolute and inexplicable. Stendhal took his 'plot' from a newspaper account of a peasant who was executed for shooting his mistress, and proceeded to transform it in the light of his own experience.¹ There is nothing in Julien's upbringing or environment to account for his gifts. His instruction has been limited to a few Latin lessons with the Curé and reading a life of Napoleon given to him by an old soldier. He has been bullied and obstructed in every possible way by his family, but when his chance comes he is ready to seize it with both hands. The lesson is obvious. The genius will either turn into Napoleon or be executed as a common criminal. The answer depends on the sort of society in which he finds himself and on the use he makes of his opportunities. In other words, environment does not determine a man's *character*, but it does determine his *fate*.

When this is grasped, it is easy to see what *le Rouge et le Noir* is 'about'. Julien's character is not, perhaps, drawn with the firmness of Fabrice's, and there are moments when Stendhal slips into melodrama or reveals the unfortunate influence of Romanticism; but these are minor flaws in his great achievement. The book is a profound study of the impact of genius on a corrupt society.

When Sainte-Beuve said that Stendhal 'forms his characters with two or three ideas', he was certainly right; but when he added that 'they are not living beings but ingeniously constructed automata', he showed that he had failed to understand his aims. Julien has a good deal in common with his creator. He had lost his mother when a child, and loathes his father and his family. All

¹On the genesis of the novels, see M. Henri Martineau's admirable study, *l'Oeuvre de Stendhal: Histoire de ses livres et de sa pensée*, Paris, 1945.

his actions are prompted by two feelings: anxiety at having no place in his own world and a consciousness of his genius. He is, as Taine remarked, *un esprit supérieur*, and he is determined to use his gifts to win a great position for himself. He has spent his youth brooding over the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* and *Tartuffe*. The first of these books is the story of a parvenu who, starting like Julien from nothing, had made himself master of Europe, and it represents the goal to be attained. The second is a handbook which explains the means which Julien must use in order to realize his ambitions. In this sense, and this sense only, Stendhal 'forms his characters with two or three ideas'.

It follows from this that the first step in Julien's career is to discover not merely what sort of a man he is, but what sort of a man he must become in order to succeed. When we read the novels, we find that all Stendhal's principal characters are tormented by the novelist's own question: 'Qu'ai-je été, que suis-je?' They are perpetually interrogating themselves about their own feelings, wondering what they really feel for this woman, why that woman leaves them cold, or asking themselves whether or not some defect in their make-up renders them incapable of loving at all.

'Il est dans l'essence de cette âme d'agir à la fois et de se regarder agir, de sentir et de se regarder sentir.'¹

Paul Bourget's comment draws attention to an important difference between Stendhal and all his predecessors. Self-knowledge is not destructive, as it was for Mme de La Fayette and Constant; it is not merely a prelude to action, as it was for Laclos; in Stendhal action and analysis are simultaneous. All his characters realize that they can only exploit their genius by becoming something, by discovering some principle of unity within themselves. They must first of all rid themselves of the gnawing sense of anxiety which dogs them and become integrated personalities, and they can only become integrated personalities by observing their feelings at the actual moment of action. *Logique* and *espagnolisme* play a big part in the drama. The function of *logique* is to integrate personality, to control and direct the blind forces of *espagnolisme*. It is *logique* which is continually pulling them up, making them pause and ask themselves what they feel and why they feel as they do.

¹ *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, I, Édition définitive, Paris, 1926, p. 298.

Although *le Rouge et le Noir* deals with the class-war, I think that it will be apparent that the term *étranger* is not primarily a *social*, but a *psychological* distinction. The 'walls' are barriers between the different classes, but they also stand for the psychological barriers which cut the 'outsider' off from the rest of humanity. For the book is much more than a conflict between two social classes. It is a conflict between two irreconcilable ways of life. Julien would have been an 'outsider' in any class of society, and he is equally out of place in the world of his father, of the Rênals and the la Moles. The fact that he belongs socially to the proletariat simply provides a particular setting for the study of a much wider problem and creates an additional obstacle to Julien's success. There was not the slightest chance of his exercising his peculiar talents in his father's world, and a rise in the social scale is necessary to start him on his career.

He does not make the first breach in the 'walls' himself. M. de Rênal is prompted by vanity to engage a tutor for his children in order to score off his fellow-bourgeois. He approaches M. Sorel, knowing that he has a son who enjoys a certain reputation for learning. The bourgeois thus makes the first breach in his own walls which lets the outsider in. From this moment Julien's fortunes depend on himself. His attack is twofold. He has to impress the bourgeois, and he has to overcome his own feeling of anxiety by a personal success. There could be no better way than to persuade the bourgeois that he is a prodigy of learning and to seduce his employer's wife. Everything goes according to plan. The bourgeois, astonished by Julien's extraordinary verbal memory, treat him as though he were a performing monkey; and Mme de Rênal, whose maternal instincts are awakened by his youth and good looks, allows her feelings to turn into something very different.

Julien's success with Mme de Rênal is a form of apprenticeship in which for the first time he puts his theories into practice, and the account of his feelings is instructive:

'Cette main se retira bien vite; mais Julien pensa qu'il était de son *devoir* d'obtenir que l'on ne retirât pas cette main quand il la touchait. L'idée d'un devoir à accomplir, et d'un ridicule ou plutôt d'un sentiment d'infériorité à encourir si l'on n'y parvenait pas, éloigna sur-le-champ tout plaisir de son cœur.'

In the French analysis of emotion, said Rivière, 'la morale

même devient un élément psychologique'.¹ Stendhal's use of the word *devoir* is an excellent example. It is the focal word of the passage, and he emphasizes it to make sure that its significance shall not escape us. It means something very different from Corneille's *devoir*. It is not a disinterested 'duty'; the imperative comes from Julien's subjective need to bolster up his own inner morale or, as Stendhal, very much in advance of his time, suggests, to rid himself of a *sentiment d'infériorité*.

This is how Stendhal describes his feelings after he has seduced Mme de Rênal:

'Le lendemain on le réveilla à cinq heures; et, ce qui eût été cruel pour Mme de Rênal si elle l'eût su, à peine lui donna-t-il une pensée. Il avait fait *son devoir, et un devoir héroïque*. Rempli de bonheur par ce sentiment, il s'enferma à clef dans sa chambre, et se livra avec un plaisir tout nouveau à la lecture des exploits de son héros.'

The italics are again Stendhal's. Julien's feelings are no longer purely subjective and selfish. His experience has modified his whole outlook, and the feelings which accompany his success are something entirely new for him. The *sentiment d'infériorité* has, at any rate for the time being, been exorcized and has been replaced by satisfaction over accomplishing *son devoir et un devoir héroïque*. There is an immense relief behind the words, a sense of release from something which was imprisoning him and preventing the development of his personality. Instead of being eaten up by a subjective feeling of inferiority, he has broken the vicious circle and identifies himself with the *public* figure of Napoleon.

'In contrast to the naturalness of the Rênal estate at Vergy,' writes Mr. Harry Levin of the love affair with Mathilde de la Mole, 'her love has ripened in a library, nourished on the chronicles of Brantôme and Aubigné and the novels of Rousseau and Prévost.'²

It is a suggestive remark, but I find it difficult to accept Mr. Levin's conclusions. The contrast between the 'naturalness' of Vergy and the atmosphere of the 'library' in Paris is certainly intentional and the meaning of the whole novel depends on a correct interpretation of it. Stendhal chose the Franche-Comté

¹ *Le Français*, Paris, 1928, p. 27.

² *Toward Stendhal*, Murray, Utah, 1945, p. 48.

because it was on the outskirts of France and geographically remote from the sophisticated capital to which Julien will eventually graduate. It is the start of his career, the place at which the forward bastions of civilization are breached to admit the intruder.

Julien's career is a journey to the interior. When he leaves Verrières, we have the impression that he is entering a long, dark tunnel and that the 'fresh, deep valleys' which surround the 'little town' are the daylight receding behind him as he penetrates further and further into it. We are aware of a feeling of claustrophobia as the seminary doors close on him. Henceforth, the drama takes place not in the open air, but in the oppressive, airless seminary, in the library of M. de la Mole and at the secret session amid the candles and the sealing wax, the papers and the serious anonymous faces of the conspirators.

The physical journey is at the same time *a journey to the interior of the mind*. It is accompanied by a deepening of experience, a growing complexity of feeling. The outer world loses its importance; the 'action' shifts to the world within. The change is well illustrated by an encounter between Julien and Mathilde when she comes into the library and asks him to fetch a book for her:

'Julien avait approché l'échelle; il avait cherché le volume, il le lui avait remis, sans encore pouvoir songer à elle. En remportant l'échelle, dans sa précipitation, il donna un coup de coude dans une glace de la bibliothèque; les éclats, en tombant sur le parquet, le réveillèrent enfin.'

The characters live in a dream world, entirely preoccupied with what is going on inside their own minds; and the movement of this passage reflects the mechanical movements of a sleep-walker. From time to time a violent incident in the external world—the breaking of the pane in the book-case or the smashing of the Japanese vase—brings them back to earth with a shock. It is the striking of a clock which recalls the dreamer from the timeless world to the world of time and chance.¹

¹One of the most striking examples of this preoccupation is the occasion when Julien seizes an old sword from the wall of the library and is on the point of attacking Mathilde who is delighted to think that she was almost killed by her lover. The sword is a talisman which transports them both to a different age, to the age to which spiritually they belong.

'Il a de l'imprévu,' remarks the Marquis in speaking to his daughter of Julien. It is his way of recognizing Julien's 'otherness', and it must be distinguished from the reactions of the bourgeois of Verrières who gape open-mouthed while he recites chapter after chapter of the New Testament from memory. The Marquis de la Mole is not interested in his looks or his parlour-tricks, but in his intellectual attainments and his character. Julien's qualities are also recognized by Mathilde, but her reactions are quite different from her father's. For here like calls to like. Mathilde, too, is an *étrangère* in nineteenth-century society, and it is because she has failed to meet anyone like herself that, until Julien arrives, she spends her time in a private world of her own, reading about the heroic exploits of her sixteenth-century ancestors. She is desperately bored and desperately out of place in a society of which she can say with some truth: 'Je ne vois que la condamnation à mort qui distingue un homme . . . c'est la seule chose qui ne s'achète pas.'

Her criticism is reinforced by an observation of the Comte Altamira's:

'Il n'y a plus de passions véritables au XIX^e siècle: c'est pour cela que l'on s'ennuie tant en France. On fait les plus grandes cruautés, mais sans cruauté.'

It used to be fashionable at one time to debate the respective merits of *le Rouge et le Noir* and *la Chartreuse de Parme*. *La Chartreuse de Parme* may be the greater novel, but I do not think that Stendhal ever surpassed the account of the love-affair between Julien and Mathilde.

'Rien [we are told] ne fut plaisant comme le dialogue de ces deux amants; sans s'en douter ils étaient animés l'un contre l'autre des sentiments de la haine la plus vive.'

This attraction-and-repulsion sounds at first like an episode in the sex-war; but Stendhal's interpretation of this fundamental antipathy is much more profound than Laclos' in the *Liaisons dangereuses*. In the *Liaisons*, it is inspired by a desire to dominate the opposite sex; in *le Rouge et le Noir* it is part of a larger war against society seen collectively. In spite of the violent conflict between them and the savage delight that they experience in humiliating one another's pride—always the vulnerable spot—they are allies against society and are united by a bond which goes far deeper than their antipathy. The words *singulier-singularité* must occur a hundred times in the second part of the novel, and

they describe the link which unites Julien and Mathilde and separates them from everyone else.¹

Stendhal's prose is seen at its most impressive in the encounters between Julien and Mathilde:

'Si vous manquez d'honneur [Mathilde says to Julien], vous pouvez me perdre ou du moins le tenter; mais ce danger, que je ne crois pas réel, ne m'empêchera certainement pas d'être sincère. Je ne vous aime plus, monsieur, mon imagination folle m'a trompée . . .

'A ce coup terrible, éperdu d'amour et de malheur, Julien essaya de se justifier. Rien de plus absurde. Se justifie-t-on de déplaire? Mais la raison n'avait plus aucun empire sur ses actions. Un instinct aveugle le poussait à retarder la décision de son sort. Il lui semblait que tant qu'il parlait, tout n'était pas fini.'

Stendhal's prose often bears a deceptive resemblance to eighteenth-century prose, but in reality its movement is very different. It does not move steadily forward from one fixed point to another. It has greater density and greater range. Every clause in a sentence corresponds to what the French call a *fait psychique* and engenders another *fait psychique*. Their relation to one another forms the pattern of his style. A passage like this is not the direct expression of emotion; it is rather a geometrical construction, a configuration of feelings, which enables us to perceive with startling clarity what is happening inside the characters' minds and to follow the clash of contradictory impulses. It is for this reason that instead of being a logical progression, Stendhal's prose is continually twisting and turning, changing direction, so that it seems to be pointing in several directions at the same time and to touch us simultaneously in different places.

The first two sentences are a series of sorties and retreats which lead up to the final assault on the position. At each sortie, Mathilde strikes Julien in a different place—his honour, his pride, his

¹It is a quality which is recognized by members of Mathilde's entourage even when they do not like it:

'Mathilde a de la singularité, pensa-t-il [M. de Croisenois]; c'est un inconvénient, mais elle donne une si belle position sociale à son mari . . . cette singularité de Mathilde peut passer pour du génie. Avec une haute naissance et beaucoup de fortune, le génie n'est point un ridicule, et alors quelle distinction!'

It is an example of the way in which Stendhal's criticism is dissolved into the novel. Her 'genius' is a threat to a precarious social order, but can be neutralized by a great position and great wealth.

belief in himself, his emotional stability—then withdraws in order to deliver a still heavier blow. The total effect is of an attack which is at once very widespread and very concentrated. Then, suddenly, Mathilde seems to gather the whole of her energies for the final smashing blow: 'I don't love you any more, Monsieur. The whole thing was an absurd illusion like your supposed hold over me and your danger to me.'

The first paragraph reveals Mathilde's complete command of the situation, the second the effect of her onslaught on Julien. When Stendhal writes: 'A ce coup terrible', we hear the sickening thud as the blow lands. In the French classic writers, *éperdu* always stands for complete mental and emotional disorientation, and in this passage it registers the devastating effect of Mathilde's attack. Julien is dazed, but makes a feeble and belated attempt to justify himself. The two short sentences—'Rien de plus absurde. Se justifie-t-on de déplaire?'—are the mocking reverberation of her words in his stunned mind. Instead of recovering, his pain increases. The attempt to justify himself is the last glimmer of sense before he becomes incoherent. The words, 'La raison n'avait plus aucun empire sur ses actions', are a sign of disintegration and collapse; and the *plus* makes us feel the mechanism of personality falling apart. When reason fails, he is thrown back on 'un instinct *aveugle*'. He struggles blindly on, persuaded that if only he can keep going, if only he can keep on talking, something must happen to save him.

These and similar passages have won for Stendhal the reputation of being one of the greatest psychologists among modern novelists. Beneath its dry sparkle, his prose has tentacular roots which thrust down into our deepest desires and deepest fears. He possessed the *vue directe* into the complexity of the human heart, the power of seizing feelings at the moment of their formation, and translating them with an admirable lucidity:

'Ce tutoiement, dépouillé du ton de la tendresse, ne faisait aucun plaisir à Julien, il s'étonnait de l'absence du bonheur; enfin, pour le sentir, il eut recours à sa raison. Il se voyait estimé par cette jeune fille si fière, et qui n'accordait jamais de louanges sans restriction; avec ce raisonnement il parvint à un bonheur d'amour propre.'

Once again the prose performs the actions that it describes. The novelist suggests a feeling to us, then proceeds to peel away the

outer layers in order to show us that it is not at all what it appears to be. The *tutoiement* should be a sign of *tendresse*, but is not. It gives Julien no 'pleasure', and he is 'astonished' at the absence of a *bonheur* which is normally a product of *tendresse* and *plaisir*. *Enfin* marks the characteristic change of direction. Julien sets to work to produce a substitute feeling of 'happiness' by the use of 'reason'. He tells himself that if there is no 'tenderness' in Mathilde's tone, at least this person who is proud and not given to overpraising anyone 'esteems' him. This argument, this manipulation of ideas, produces a fresh combination of feelings. We have watched the whole process from the beginning, have seen the feelings transformed. With the *bonheur d'amour propre* everything suddenly falls neatly into place.

In other places Stendhal writes:

'Deux mois de combats et de sensations nouvelles renouvelèrent pour ainsi dire tout son être moral.'

'Ce cruel soupçon changea toute la position morale de Julien. Cette idée trouva dans son cœur un commencement d'amour qu'elle n'eut pas de peine à détruire.'

'Ces souvenirs de bonheur passé s'emparaient de Julien et détruisaient bientôt tout l'ouvrage de la raison.'

'Son mot si franc, mais si stupide, vint tout changer en un instant: Mathilde, sûre d'être aimée, le méprisa parfaitement.'

In all these examples, the operative words are the verbs *changer*, *renouveler*, *détruire*. The verb—usually a transitive verb—is the pivot of Stendhal's most characteristic sentences because he is much more interested in mental *activity* than in mental *states*. These three verbs indicate the field of experience. His characters' feelings are constantly 'changing', are engaged in a continual process of 'renewal' and 'destruction'. They are not superficial changes of mood; they go to the roots of the 'moral being'. A sudden shock 'destroys' their moral stability; they set to work slowly and painfully to rebuild it. Another shock undoes the work of 'reason', and the whole process starts all over again. A final sentence completes the picture:

'Mathilde était alors dans l'état où Julien se trouvait quelques jours auparavant.'

Although they are bound to one another in the innermost depths of their being, Julien and Mathilde are practically never both in the same mood on the same day, and this produces the

clash. It is a psychological obstacle race in which they take it in turns to be pursuer and pursued, executioner and victim.

One of the most interesting things about Stendhal's characters is the impression that they give that the whole of their lives, the whole of their being, is engaged in every action:

'Le courage était la première qualité de son caractère [we are told of Mathilde]. Rien ne pouvait lui donner quelque agitation et la guérir d'un fond d'ennui sans cesse renaissant que l'idée qu'elle jouait à croix ou à pile son existence entière.'¹

It is this that makes the encounters between Julien and Mathilde so dramatic and such a strain on their personalities. We may sometimes wonder why they could not go on indefinitely, but Stendhal gives the answer in a sentence:

'Elle [Mathilde] tomba tout à fait évanouie.

'—La voilà donc, cette orgueilleuse à mes pieds, se dit Julien.'

The life of Stendhal's characters is a process of *extension* which finally reaches the point at which not merely something, but *everything* gives way. It is because they are 'outsiders' that they can find no proper outlet for their great gifts. Their incredible calculations and their immensely sharpened sensibility, which result from this position, subject their personalities to an intolerable strain until they are driven to abandon the world of action and to withdraw completely into the world of contemplation.

Julien's imprisonment and death have been variously interpreted. One writer, comparing him with Meursault, the hero of M. Camus' *l'Étranger*, suggests that he is a 'social' rather than a 'metaphysical martyr'.² An American critic speaks of 'the alienated libido and the expiating martyr "in love with death"'.³ For reasons that I have already given, I think that it is easy to misinterpret the 'social' factor; and though the desire for 'martyrdom' and 'the death-wish' are present, I do not believe that they are decisive. When Julien reaches the prison at Besançon his sensibility is exhausted. The extended personality has reached the

¹Italics mine.

²H. A. Mason: 'M. Camus and the Tragic Hero' in *Scrutiny*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, p. 83.

³Matthew Josephson: *Stendhal or The Pursuit of Happiness*, New York, 1946, p. 346. (This is a useful, well-documented critical biography. It suffers, perhaps, from making too many concessions to a public which does not know French and the French background; but it is written with characteristic American freshness and is commendably free from Anglo-Saxon reticences.)

point at which it can no longer carry on, when there is nothing left for it in life. This explains Julien's attitude to Mathilde and Mme de Rênal. He cannot face the prospect of life together with Mathilde, and he turns to the more restful figure of Mme de Rênal. She is, of course, the mother-image and the prison itself a symbol of the womb to which he wishes to return. Once in prison, he can give himself up to *rêverie*. The last thing he wants is to be acquitted or to escape, or even to return to the world of action after a term of imprisonment. Mathilde's attempts to save him are simply exasperating and he takes good care that they fail.

I think we must add that the prison episode is also a profound study of the psychology of heroism. Julien appears to stick to his ideals, to go heroically to his death. In fact, he commits suicide; but he does not do so for the reasons suggested by his critics. The 'hero' lives at a far greater pitch of intensity than the general run of men, and what appears to be an heroic death in battle is probably in many instances a case of suicide dictated by an unconscious realization that he is 'finished'.

The account of the execution is a masterly example of Stendhal's power of understatement:

'Tout se passa simplement, convenablement, et de sa part sans aucune affectation.'

The last scene, in which Mathilde follows the funeral cortège with Julien's severed head on her knees, has perplexed Stendhal's critics. It seems to me to be a deliberately macabre piece of comedy. His admiration for the sixteenth century was deep-rooted, and he certainly approved this final display of Mathilde's *singularité*, which could only have appeared odd to an effete age. It was Stendhal's parting shot at the men of 1830.

(To be concluded)

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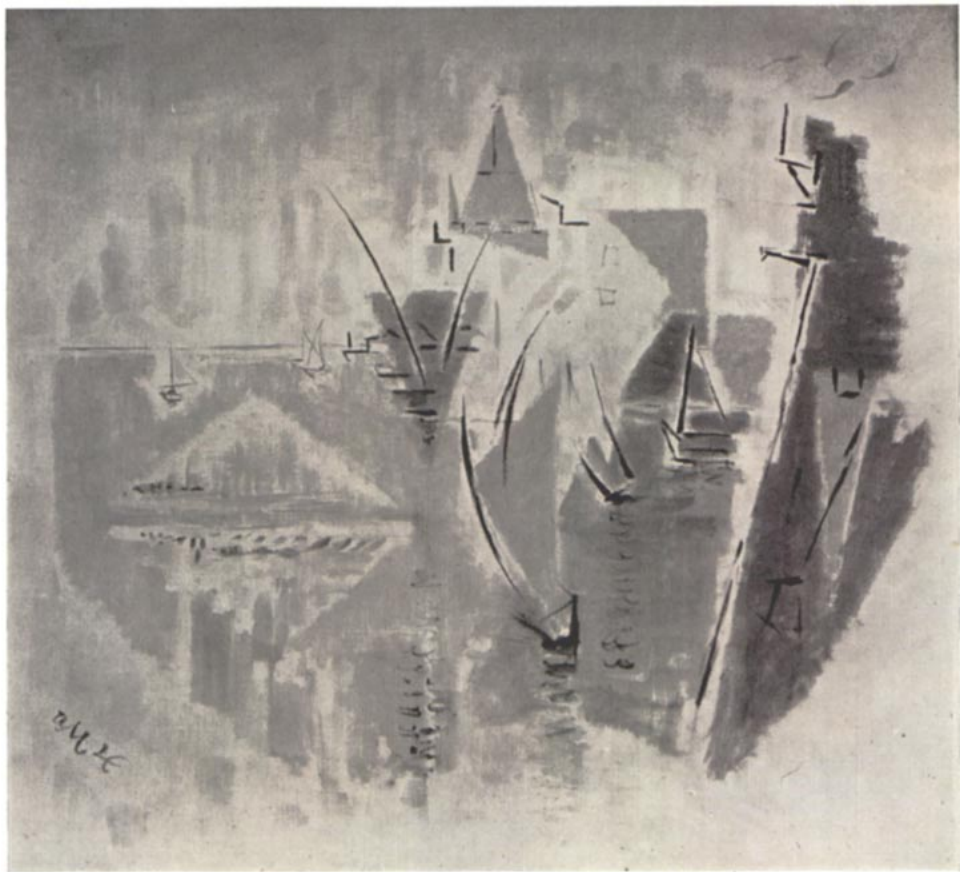
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Published by the Proprietors, HORIZON, 2 Lansdowne Terrace, London, W.C.1,
and printed in England at The Curwen Press, Ltd., Plaistow, London, E.13